



# Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) of University of the West of England Bristol's International College

April 2018

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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 Colleges UK Ltd, University of the West of England Bristol's International College. The review took place from 10 to 11 April 2018 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Brenda Eade
- Mrs Catherine Fairhurst.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#)<sup>2</sup> and explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Embedded Colleges\)](#).<sup>3</sup> For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges): [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review)

## Key findings

### Judgements

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered by the provider **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities is **commended**.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice**.

- The use of the specialised mathematics software by teaching staff, which supports science and engineering students to progress to the University (Expectation B3).
- The College's use of peer-assisted learning and personal achievement portfolios, which enables students to develop as independent learners (Expectation B3).
- The effective linking of study skills to subject disciplines, which supports students to better communicate and operate within their chosen field, and which provides an opportunity to broaden the curriculum (Expectation B3).
- The formation of a Concerns Group, which identifies students who may be at risk of not progressing and which discusses, implements and reviews appropriate action to support the students (Expectation B4).
- The individualised and systematic feedback on assessment, including, for example, the design and implementation of a colour-coded matrix, which enables students to understand the basis on which academic judgements are made (Expectation B6).
- The provision of concise and accessible information, in poster format, relating to assessment regulations and feedback from external examiners, which enables students to have an immediate understanding of the regulations and comments from external examiners (Expectation C).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation**:

By December 2018:

- bring the membership of its deliberative committees, the frequency of meetings and the format of minutes in line with the terms of reference, to facilitate full staff and student participation in the governance of the College (Expectation A2.1).

### Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not affirm any actions already being taken to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to students.

### Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance check has been satisfactorily completed.

## About the provider

The University of the West of England Bristol's International College (the College) is an embedded College, which is part of the Kaplan International Colleges UK Ltd (KIC) pathways framework, branded as Kaplan International Pathways, operating in partnership with the University of the West of England, Bristol (the University). Students who achieve the progression requirements agreed with the University are able to proceed directly to a programme at the University.

Kaplan International Pathways aims to deliver world-leading pathway programmes designed specifically to meet the needs of international students primarily based outside the EU. Kaplan Pathways programmes prepare international students to progress to university and are designed in close collaboration with partner universities. Programmes incorporate study skills, English language, transferable skills and discipline-specific academic modules for the programme to which students wish to progress.

Kaplan International Pathways has nine Colleges across the UK. The majority of the Colleges are linked to a single partner University but Kaplan International College London offers progression to several universities.

Kaplan International Pathways has established a Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality (CLIQ). CLIQ is primarily based in Nottingham and Liverpool with virtual team presence across all colleges and, together with colleges, has responsibility across all the Kaplan Pathways colleges for academic development and enhancement and for coordinating quality assurance.

This was the second QAA review of the College. KIC underwent a Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) - HER (EC) - at provider level in 2016, with positive outcomes (including commended judgements for information and enhancement). QAA has recently reviewed other KIC Colleges (University of Brighton International College, Bournemouth University International College, Glasgow International College, Liverpool International College, Nottingham Trent International College, Kaplan International College London), with positive outcomes. The HER (EC) visit to the College was one of three (the others being The University of Nottingham International College and Bournemouth University International College) which took place during March and April 2018.

The College opened in September 2012. It offers two foundation certificate programmes in business, law and social sciences and in science and engineering; two International Year One programmes in business and in engineering; and two pre-master's programmes in business, law and social science and in science and engineering. At the time of the review there were 197 students studying at the College.

## Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

### **1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered by the provider and/or on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations**

**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 (FHEQ)* 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 Kaplan International Pathways is responsible for ensuring that the pathway qualifications awarded by The University of the West of England, Bristol's International College (the College) are positioned at the appropriate levels, named in accordance with the conventions of the relevant framework and that learning outcomes align with the qualifications descriptors.

1.2 Kaplan International Pathways has a Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), which includes a credit framework, and which is used for the award of pathway qualifications. The QAF maps to the UK credit and qualifications frameworks, links to Subject Benchmark Statements and specifies the characteristic outcomes for each of the awards. The procedures for programme design and development are set out in the Kaplan International Pathways Academic Standards Quality Manual (ASQM).

1.3 The processes for aligning qualifications to the appropriate framework, for the award of credit and for referencing Subject Benchmark Statements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.4 To test the operation of these arrangements, the review team reviewed documentation relating to the Kaplan International Pathways processes for setting and maintaining academic standards. This included the QAF and the relevant sections of the ASQM as well as a recent example of an approval process. The team scrutinised the programme and module specifications for the pathways on the virtual learning environment (VLE), delivered by the College. The review team met senior members of staff from Kaplan International Pathways, the College and from the University, who have responsibility for the development of programmes and the oversight of academic standards.

1.5 The review team found that the pathway specifications of Kaplan International Pathways define the content and structure of each programme and the volume of credit awarded and link to the relevant qualifications frameworks. Foundation certificates are mapped to level 3 of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). They have a credit volume of 80 credits. The International Year One programmes are mapped to level 4 of the FHEQ and have a credit volume of 120 credits. The pre-master's programmes are mapped to level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and have a credit volume of 80 Credits. The module specifications set out the level, volume of credit, study hours, learning outcomes, indicative content, assessment and key texts for each of the units within the pathway.

1.6 The University has input into the development of the College's programmes through the Joint Academic Management Board (JAMB). (The JAMB at the College equates to the JAB at other Kaplan Pathways Colleges.) This ensures that the pathways are designed to enable students to progress to designated undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at the University. The College indicated that there is some opportunity for students to progress to non-specified programmes also. This is negotiated between the College and the University on a case-by-case basis.

1.7 Changes to the programme specification and module contents, including assessment, are overseen by CLIQ, approved by the Academic Planning and Quality Committee (APQC) and then confirmed by JAMB. The recently introduced Kaplan International Pathways 'Specification Management System' provides an effective and secure system for maintaining up-to-date programme specifications and for tracking any changes to them.

1.8 The review team concludes that the programmes are aligned to the relevant framework, that qualifications are set at the appropriate level, and that learning outcomes reflect the descriptors for that level and take account of Subject Benchmark Statements. Kaplan International Pathways awards qualifications to indicate the achievement of programme learning outcomes. The College effectively adheres to the comprehensive and detailed processes provided by Kaplan International Pathways for securing academic standards. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**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**

1.9 Kaplan International Pathways has overall responsibility for governance and for managing academic standards and quality. This is effected through the APQC, which normally meets four times per year. The Academic Standards Quality of Programmes Report (ASQP), which takes an overview of Annual Programme Reports (APRs) from all Kaplan Pathways UK Colleges, is considered by APQC and enables Kaplan International Pathways to monitor academic standards across all its international pathway colleges.

1.10 The Governance Framework, which includes management and committee structures established by Kaplan International Pathways, provides clear lines of responsibility and reporting. It sets out the roles and membership of the key committees for all of the embedded colleges. College Directors report to the Director of Colleges based at Kaplan International Pathways' headquarters in London. Committee structures are standardised across Colleges with some local variations to conform to partner university requirements.

1.11 Policies and procedures for the maintenance and management of academic standards and quality are set out in the QAF and the ASQM. These include assessment regulations, and make provision for assessment boards to confirm the achievement of the learning outcomes for the award of qualifications.

1.12 The centralised policies and procedures, together with the governance and management structures, provide a transparent and comprehensive framework for the award of credit and qualifications and would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.13 To test the operation of these arrangements, the team reviewed the terms of reference and minutes of the committees including the APQC, New Product Development and Approvals Group (NPDAG), and the Business Approval Group for Programme Developments (BAGPD). The team considered the revised terms of reference of the JAMB and Joint Strategic Management Board (JSMB), and scrutinised the minutes of meetings of the JAMB, JSMB, the Senior Management Team (SMT), the Programme Committee and the student representative meetings.

1.14 The review team analysed the College's APRs for 2016-17 together with the relevant sections of the ASQP and the College Action Plan. The review team referred to the reports from external examiners and met senior members of staff from Kaplan International Pathways, the College and the University.

1.15 The review team found that the staffing structure of the College aligns with the Kaplan International Pathways organisational structure, providing clear lines of reporting on quality and standards at the operational level. The College Director has overall responsibility for all aspects of the student experience and standards. The Academic Director is responsible for the delivery of the curriculum and for managing academic staff. The Head of College Services reports to the College Director and is responsible for student services, including student support.

1.16 The JSMB between the College and the University is responsible for reviewing the performance of the College, developing the relationship between the University and Kaplan International Pathways and planning the strategic direction of the College. It receives reports from JAMB and has overall responsibility for risk management and the operation of the College.

1.17 JAMB has oversight of standards and monitors the progression of students from the College onto the relevant University programmes. The terms of reference of JAMB were revised in 2014 when the College moved away from delivering dual awards through a joint regulatory framework with the University. It now operates under Kaplan International Pathways regulations and students receive Kaplan International Pathways awards. The JAMB is chaired by the Academic Lead of the University and focuses on post-progression student performance as well as engagement with students while in College. The SMT monitors the performance of the College, including standards and quality, at the operational level.

1.18 The Programme Committee considers the College's APRs and monitors the College Action Plan. It discusses operational issues relating to the College pathways including matters that have been raised by students at the student representative meetings. The terms of reference of the Programme Committee include student membership and indicate that the Committee should meet once each term. However, students are not represented at the meetings and it is unclear from the minutes of meetings when the previous meeting took place and how actions are carried forward and reviewed. The review team **recommends** that the College bring the membership of its deliberative committees, the frequency of meetings and the format of minutes in line with the terms of reference, to facilitate full staff and student participation in the governance of the College.

1.19 Although the College's committees are not fully aligned with the terms of reference and membership set out by the College and Kaplan International Pathways, the review team concludes that the rigorous monitoring of standards and quality by Kaplan International Pathways through its deliberative committees provides a transparent and effective framework for the award of credit. Through the JSMB, the University is able to confirm that appropriate governance and regulatory structures are in place. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**



**Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

**Findings**

1.20 Kaplan International Pathways has developed templates for programme and module specifications that enable definitive information to be recorded for each award including the programme structure, indicative content and assessment. These are aligned to the QAF which maps to the relevant UK qualifications frameworks and is used for the purpose of the award of credit and qualifications as defined in the programme specifications. Kaplan International Pathways has a detailed process for the approval and amendment of programmes, which is set out in the ASQM.

1.21 The arrangements in place (including the templates and systems for recording programme content, and the approval and amendment of programmes, which are provided by Kaplan International Pathways) would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.22 To test the operation of these arrangements the review team examined documentation relating to the award of qualifications to students studying at the College (including programme and module specifications, transcripts and records of changes to programmes). The review team met staff and discussed the use of the recently installed tracking system and library for programme specifications, 'KI Connect'.

1.23 The review team found that the programme specifications for the College are clearly set out on the Kaplan International Pathways templates, make reference to the UK Quality Code, and are mapped to the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements for the University pathway to which they provide progression. Programme specifications set out the learning outcomes for the programme and for the constituent modules and specify the means by which these are delivered and assessed.

1.24 The College has clearly defined agreements with the University that enable students to progress to the designated University programme upon successful completion of their pathway. College programmes are developed in consultation with the University through JAMB. All new programmes and any changes to programmes are approved by APQC. Minor modifications are approved by the relevant Programme Committee in consultation with the SMT.

1.25 Kaplan International Pathways has recently audited its programme specifications and these are now stored online as KI Connect. This provides secure storage and central access to definitive programme documents. Overall responsibility for the award of credit and qualifications rests with Kaplan International Pathways. Records of study and/or transcripts, confirming the achievement of the learning outcomes for the programme and which list the modules studied, are given to students upon successful completion of their programme.

1.26 The review team concludes that Kaplan International Pathways has detailed systems for making awards to students following successful achievement of the learning

outcomes for their programmes, which are used effectively by the College and monitored centrally by Kaplan International Pathways. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**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**

1.27 The QAF and the Curriculum Development Process defines Kaplan International Pathways' principles of programme design and approval. The key focus of the Approval Group (NPDAG) is on the outcomes of the Product Review (Kaplan International Pathways' review of its offering). BAGPD and NPDAG consider any marketing, recruitment, financial, academic and compliance implications of new or changed programme proposals. The QAF identifies academic frameworks against which undergraduate and postgraduate awards are mapped. Kaplan International Pathways uses the RQF and FHEQ as the external reference points for the QAF. Kaplan International Pathways' intranet, accessible by all staff, contains links to the QAA Subject Benchmark Statements. Academic approval takes place through APQC. ASQM describes the process for the approval of taught programmes. The College has responsibility for implementing these processes. There is a formal procedure for course closure.

1.28 Kaplan International Pathways has designed programme approval procedures to ensure that academic standards are set at a level that meets UK threshold standards and are in accordance with relevant academic frameworks and regulations. These procedures would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.29 To test the operation of these arrangements the review team scrutinised the Kaplan International Pathways' quality documentation together with approval documentation and minutes of College meetings to consider the application of these procedures. Discussions with the College, Kaplan International Pathways and University staff also contributed to the assessment of this Expectation.

1.30 JAMB has overall responsibility for the assurance of academic standards and the approval for new programmes. Kaplan International Pathways and the College pay strict attention to standards throughout the preparation and approval of new programmes, which ensures the alignment of content and assessment with the UK threshold standards contained within the RQF or FHEQ. A recent example of the programme approval documentation for the Biochemistry of Life module demonstrates that the processes described above operate effectively and as intended. External examiners agree that the academic standards are comparable with those of other similar institutions and that standards are in accordance with FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.31 The review team concludes that the application of the Kaplan International Pathways' policies and processes for programme approval ensure that academic standards are set at a level that meets UK threshold standards and are in accordance with relevant academic frameworks and regulations. The Expectation is met and the associated 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**

1.32 The APQC is responsible for monitoring the consistency of academic quality and comparability of standards across all Kaplan International Pathways Colleges. The Kaplan Graduate Performance at Host Partner Universities and the annual ASQP presented to APQC compare the performance and progression rates of student cohorts, modules, programmes and Colleges. This level of analysis further secures academic standards.

1.33 The programme approval procedures consider learning outcomes and their assessment to ensure alignment with threshold standards. The standard programme and module specifications state the programme learning outcomes, which are defined in the QAF. The ASQM details Kaplan International Pathways' assessment principles and regulations. A formal Assessment Board ensures the award of credit is made only where both the UK threshold standards and Kaplan International Pathways' academic standards have been satisfied. Kaplan International Pathways provides a guide for Colleges on establishing alternative assessment arrangements for students with disabilities. The College is responsible for securing academic standards through setting, marking, moderation and feedback of all assessment except for the centrally managed English language exit module. These policies and regulations would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.34 To test the operation of these arrangements the review team considered a range of evidence, including programme and module specifications, the Kaplan International Pathways ASQM and the external examiners' reports, and met College staff responsible for assessment and oversight and students.

1.35 The College awards credit to students only when the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated thoroughly through assessment. The College maps learning outcomes to varied assessment modes during each programme approval or modification. The structure of the programmes enables the learning outcomes to be met. Each module specification clearly states its learning objectives and the assessment methods. In order to secure academic standards with an outcomes-based approach, all staff attend staff development on designing assessment and marking criteria.

1.36 A formally constituted Assessment Board, chaired by the College's Academic Director and attended by the external examiners, decides the student results. This ensures that pass levels are awarded only when academic standards have been satisfied through the College's adherence to Kaplan International Pathways' assessment requirements and regulations. The internal moderation procedure checks the assessment instrument is at the appropriate level and the external examiners confirm that assessment is robust, with rigorous academic standards that are appropriate for the qualification.

1.37 The College has a process for managing reasonable adjustments for students with protected characteristics. These adjustments include, for example, allowing a candidate extra time for examinations or use of a laptop.

1.38 The review team concludes that the students' achievement of their programme's learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment. These decisions are reached by formally constituted assessment boards. 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**

1.39 The ASQM provides the framework for the monitoring and review of programmes to ensure that its Colleges achieve appropriate academic standards. The Programme Leader drafts an APR, which is approved by the College Programme Committee and received by the College SMT, the JAMB, the external examiner and CLIQ. CLIQ then compiles the annual ASQP for the APQC, the College SMT and the Kaplan International Pathways SMT. Through the ASQP, student achievement against Kaplan International Pathways, UK and international reference points is measured. A Kaplan International Pathways curriculum review took place in 2016-17 and any changes will be implemented in 2019-20, as part of the Product Review. The policies and procedures detailed in the ASQM would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.40 To test the operation of these arrangements the review team scrutinised a range of evidence to test the success of the framework and its associated processes. This included documents such as the ASQM, JAMB minutes and the APRs. Discussions with College and senior University staff further contributed evidence that programme monitoring and review processes address the achievement of academic standards.

1.41 The College meticulously applies Kaplan International Pathways' processes for monitoring programmes to maintain academic standards. There is oversight by the University through JAMB and the link tutors. Kaplan International Pathways has strategic oversight through CLIQ and the APQC. The College follows the University's requirements for periodic review of the programmes.

1.42 The Academic Director produces an APR using the Kaplan International Pathways template. This contains detailed programme quality and enhancement activities, qualitative and quantitative data including success and challenges, student achievement and performance, student performance at the University, and student and external examiner feedback. This results in an Action Plan for the following year. The minutes demonstrate routine discussion of the APRs by the Programme Committees.

1.43 The documentary evidence and discussion with College staff confirm that the College has in place processes of programme monitoring that address the students' achievement of threshold academic standards and those required for progression to University.

1.44 The review team concludes that the careful application of the policies and procedures detailed in the ASQM allow Kaplan International Pathways and the College to determine whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required to progress to the host University are being maintained. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**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**

**Findings**

1.45 Kaplan International Pathways has introduced external involvement in the setting and maintaining of academic standards and the curriculum development processes. This is described in the new External Review Guidelines document. External review evidence is an element in the curriculum change proposal forms submitted to APQC. Kaplan International Pathways expects Colleges to ensure curriculum changes and new programme proposals are evidence-based and have received an appropriate level of external scrutiny.

1.46 External examiners are members of the Assessment Boards and submit written reports. The University, through its link tutors and its chairing of JAMB, also contributes significant external expertise to the programmes, which are approved by Kaplan International Pathways and endorsed by the University. Kaplan International Pathways achieves additional external referencing through the RQF, FHEQ, CEFR and UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA). The partnership with the University and the regulatory and policy framework of Kaplan International Pathways would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.47 To test the operation of these arrangements the review looked at the guidance in the Kaplan International Pathways ASQM and at the policies and regulations relating to approval, monitoring, review and the role of external examiners. The review team also reviewed minutes of meetings and external examiners' reports. The review team discussed arrangements for the involvement of external and independent expertise in a meeting with senior staff of the College.

1.48 As there is a defined centralised curriculum development and approval process for all Kaplan International Pathways Colleges, the use of external and independent expertise applies to them all. The College demonstrates external and independent expertise at key stages of the quality processes mainly through the University and external examiners. The University has appropriate and robust oversight of academic standards through JAMB and the link tutors. The minutes of JAMB and the assessment board demonstrate that the College uses the externality of the University in a systematic way. The University ensures employer involvement through its Advisory Boards. The Director of the College is a member of the University's Engineering Advisory Board.

1.49 External examiners are members of the Assessment Boards and provide impartial advice and recommendations as to whether the assessments demonstrate that academic standards are achieved. Their reports confirm that programmes adhere to relevant professional and regulatory standards and benchmarks. Kaplan International Pathways' recent External Review Guidelines ensure external contribution to programme modifications.

1.50 The review team concludes that there are procedures to use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards for the College's programmes. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**



## The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered by the provider and/or on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.51 In reaching its judgement, the review team considered its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.52 All Expectations in this area are met and the associated level of risk is low in all cases.

1.53 The College has appropriate procedures for ensuring academic standards, which are aligned with Kaplan International Pathways' policies and procedures. There are effective arrangements in place for the management of the quality of programmes, in partnership with the University.

1.54 There is one recommendation in this judgement area, in Expectation A2.1, that the College bring the membership of its deliberative committees, the frequency of meetings and the format of minutes in line with the terms of reference, to facilitate full staff and student participation in the governance of the College.

1.55 The review team found that there was some lack of alignment of the membership of the Programme Committee and frequency of Programme Committee meetings with the terms of reference, and that the minutes of the Programme Committee meetings lacked formality and detail. The recommendation concerns minor oversights in the College's governance arrangements that do not present any serious risks to the management of academic standards.

1.56 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards offered by the provider **meets** UK expectations.

## 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 Kaplan International Pathways SMT has strategic oversight of programme design, development and approval through the NPDA and the BAGPD. The central processes are documented in the QAF and ASQM, as described in A3.1 above. The APQC makes final decisions on programme and module approval and significant modifications. To ensure consistency between colleges, the QAF defines learning outcomes for each level of programme together with an analysis of graduate attributes. Kaplan International Pathways has recently revised the Curriculum Change Proposal Form to include external review. The procedures for programme design, development and approval would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.2 To test the operation of these arrangements, the review team reviewed documents (including the Kaplan International Pathways quality manual (ASQM), JAMB minutes and programme approval documentation), and discussed the arrangements in meetings with College and University staff.

2.3 The College systematically and consistently applies Kaplan International Pathways' processes for programme design, development and approval to enhance the quality of learning opportunities. The 2017 programme modification documentation of the Biochemistry of Life assessment amendment clearly illustrates the application of these processes. This procedure ensures the programme modifications are assessed against the criteria in the QAF. The current ongoing Product Review and the introduction of the external guidelines show how Kaplan International Pathways evaluate and improve these processes.

2.4 The effective cooperation between the College and the University is demonstrated especially in curriculum development. There are extensive discussions informally with the University faculties about the relevance of the College's curricula to the pathway degrees. The Academic Director updates the University formally about the Kaplan International Pathways Product Review at JAMB, which has approved the new programme structure for the pre-master's programme. The University also takes the opportunity at these meetings to discuss the impact of its changes on the College's curriculum. The University Link Tutor arrangement enhances the effective development of the College's programmes.

2.5 College teaching staff were seconded to CLIQ during the 2013 curriculum review and can clearly describe how they contribute to programme development by completing a proposal form which, once approved internally, is submitted to APQC. Staff are currently being given feedback from Kaplan International Pathways on module specifications for the Product Review. There is also evidence of how students have influenced the development of programmes, for example through the introduction of academic study workshops and changes in assessment modes.

2.6 The review team concludes that the process for the design, development and approval of programmes aligns with Kaplan International Pathways' quality systems, and

this rigour of process is enhanced by the close working relationship that the College has with the University. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**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 selection of students who are able to complete their programme.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education**

**Findings**

2.7 Recruitment, selection and admission is managed centrally by Kaplan International Pathways. Within the Marketing and Recruitment team there are a number of functional teams to support students, for example: Admissions, Pre-Enrolment Services, Central Accommodation services; and Visa and Auditing services. The Director of Admissions oversees the review teams. Policies and procedures for admission of students to all Kaplan Pathways programmes are set out in the Admissions Manual, are linked to Chapter B2 of the Quality Code, and include a detailed process for making decisions about the suitability of each application.

2.8 These centralised admissions processes, which take account of Chapter B2 of the Quality Code, would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.9 To test the operation of these arrangements, the review team scrutinised documentation (including policies and procedures relating to admission; and the information given to students, including the prospectus, offer letters, pre-arrival and accommodation guides). The review team also met staff from the College, Kaplan International Pathways and the University.

2.10 The review team noted that academic staff are provided with an overview of the role of admissions, for example at the Kaplan International Pathways Leadership and Management staff training programme. Kaplan International Pathways has a training policy for admissions staff which includes a log of the training each member of staff has undertaken.

2.11 Overseas agents are appointed to recruit students in their home country. The appointment of a new agent is subject to due diligence activities undertaken by the wider Kaplan International Pathways group. Training is provided for all agents through the Kaplan International Pathways 'on-boarding' process.

2.12 Recruitment targets and the introduction of new courses are discussed with the University through the JSMB. A nursing progression route has recently been added to the programmes offered by the College and current initiatives for new programmes include the development of courses sponsored by local companies.

2.13 The general entry requirements for all the College's pathways are agreed with the University and are published in the prospectus and on the website.

2.14 The suitability of the entry criteria is monitored by tracking student performance on their pathway programmes and the College is working with the University to obtain more data on student performance once they have progressed to the University. Kaplan International Pathways has undertaken several admissions monitoring activities, which include analysing student performance in relation to start dates.

2.15 Retention and progression data indicates that students are able to complete their programmes of study and successfully progress to their University pathway. College alumni confirmed that their foundation programme had effectively prepared them for their University course.

2.16 Link tutors from the University discuss with the College changes to entry requirements and how this might impact on recruitment to the College. English language levels for architecture are currently under review to ensure students are able to achieve the required level of English language prior to entering their University programme.

2.17 Admissions' decisions are normally made by the central Kaplan International Pathways admissions review team and there is a detailed procedure for verifying qualifications and making decisions about the suitability of a student to study at the College. This is clearly set out in the Admissions Manual. Reference is made to NARIC to check international qualifications against the entry requirements.

2.18 The College is consulted by the Kaplan International Pathways admissions review team about students who do not meet the entry criteria for their chosen pathway. There is also a dialogue between the Kaplan International Pathways admissions review team, the College and the University regarding students who want to undertake a University programme for which there is no direct pathway or where the student does not fully meet the entry requirements for the University programme. A recent example is a student wishing to study English at the University. The student completed the College foundation certificate programme and then undertook additional reading to meet the entry requirements of the University.

2.19 A joint offer letter from Kaplan International Pathways and the University is sent to all successful applicants that states the percentage scores and English language scores the student must achieve on their pathway programme to enable them to progress to their designated University programme.

2.20 Kaplan International Pathways has a process for programme closure that makes provision for supporting students who have already been made an offer for a programme that will no longer be offered.

2.21 Students confirm that they receive all the information they require prior to joining the College and indicate that the information on specific programmes, such as the link to the aerospace industry for the engineering pathway, is an encouragement to them to join the College. Applicants receive support from agents to complete the application process and are able to contact the Kaplan International Pathways admissions review team and College staff prior to starting their programme. The College provides opportunities for students to discuss specific learning needs.

2.22 A week-long induction programme held at the beginning of each programme introduces students to their programme of study. They also have the opportunity to meet alumni who have graduated to the University and who help them with settling into the College. Students are asked to provide feedback on the admissions process during the induction week and are also encouraged to complete the arrival survey.

2.23 The review team concludes that the centralised admissions process, which adheres to the principles of fair admission, is transparent, reliable, valid and inclusive, and is effectively implemented for the recruitment and admission of students to the College.

Admissions staff, College teaching and support staff and students confirmed that the procedures and policies in place support the selection of students who are able to successfully complete their programmes and progress to the University. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.**

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.24 Kaplan International Pathways takes a strategic approach to learning and teaching, which is included in the Strategic Plan. The Kaplan International Pathways Learning and Teaching Framework is the reference point for the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy for each College. The Framework sets out five main areas of practice: pedagogy, quality assurance and enhancement, blended learning, student engagement and professional development. CLIQ has central oversight of the quality of teaching and learning for all Colleges.

2.25 The central guidance from Kaplan International Pathways through the Learning and Teaching Framework, oversight by CLIQ and the College's own Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.26 To test the operation of these arrangements, the team reviewed the documentation relating to learning and teaching (including the Learning and Teaching Framework, the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy of the College and minutes of JAMB and Programme Committee). The review team also met staff from the College, Kaplan International Pathways and the University, and students.

2.27 The review team found that a variety of teaching methods is used by the College, which includes group work, guest lectures and tutorials. Close support is provided for students to develop their academic skills. For students following the Science and Engineering pathway, specialist software has been developed in conjunction with the University to ensure that students have the necessary level of mathematics to effectively engage with their University programme. The use of the specialised mathematics software by teaching staff, which supports science and engineering students in their progression to the University, is identified as **good practice**.

2.28 Students participate in 'Learning Outside the Classroom' activities, which include visits to institutions relevant to their subject area, such as law courts. They are also involved in social activities to support their integration into the UK system of education. They have access to specialist University resources such as science and engineering laboratories. The College encourages students to become independent learners through the completion of personal achievement portfolios. Students acknowledged that although these had involved extensive input, completing the portfolios had encouraged them to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and plan their future studies. Further support is provided through peer assisted learning facilitated by alumni from the College who work with students from induction to the College through to progression to University. The College's use of peer-assisted learning and personal achievement portfolios, which enables students to develop as independent learners is identified as **good practice**.

2.29 The teaching review team combines the delivery of subject-based material with the development of academic skills and works closely with subject tutors. During the English language classes students are encouraged to use vocabulary relevant to their chosen subject. They complete assessments for their skills modules, which are based on their

subject areas. The link between skills and subject matter has improved student engagement with the skills modules, and students spoke positively about the relevance to their University programme of study. The effective linking of study skills to subject disciplines, which supports students to better communicate and operate within their chosen field, and which provides an opportunity to broaden the curriculum, is **good practice**.

2.30 Students provide feedback on the quality of teaching through end-of-module surveys and frequent meetings with academic staff. The outcomes of module evaluation are included in the APRs.

2.31 All teaching staff are qualified to the level above that which they are teaching. New staff complete an induction programme, which includes an introduction to both the content of the pathway programmes and guidance on teaching international students. Teaching observations are linked to probation and annual appraisal. Staff also participate in peer observation, which enables them to share best practice.

2.32 CLIQ provides information about training sessions, conferences and projects and supports the sharing of best practice. Kaplan International Pathways provides a dedicated 'best practice' site on the VLE, which acts as a hub for collaboration and is a repository for sharing resources and finding answers to frequently asked questions.

2.33 Continuing professional development is supported through internal training programmes such as the Kaplan International Pathways Professional Development Programme. CLIQ also runs webinars for tutors. College staff are able to access the staff development programmes offered by the University and have recently participated in training relating to autism.

2.34 Kaplan International Pathways has implemented its Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy (TEL), which is designed to develop staff competence in the use of technology. The College is currently upgrading the VLE and investing in new packages for online assessment and feedback to be attached to the VLE. Staff have had training through TEL, but the use of TEL for online assessment is currently at the research stage at the College.

2.35 The review team concludes that through the implementation of its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, with systematic monitoring of learning and teaching by Kaplan International Pathways, the College provides a range of learning opportunities that are continually reviewed and enhanced and enable students to develop as independent learners with the capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking. This is confirmed by their successful progression to University pathways. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**



**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**

2.36 Kaplan International Pathways aims to provide a high quality learning experience which meets the specific needs of international students and facilitates their smooth transition to higher education. There are central systems that support students throughout the recruitment and enrolment process and provide opportunities for the identification of additional needs. Kaplan International Pathways takes a strategic overview of academic and pastoral support and the resources provided by all of its Colleges through the Kaplan International Pathways SMT. There is a range of policies and procedures that facilitate the smooth transition of students to higher education in the UK, and to their chosen University pathway. This includes the development of digital literacy skills.

2.37 These procedures and policies, which are implemented by the College and monitored by Kaplan International Pathways, would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.38 To test the operation of these arrangements the team reviewed the systems and resources in place to support students throughout their programmes of study and enable their successful transition to University pathways. It also met teaching and support staff, and students.

2.39 The learning experience and support offered by the College, which begins at the recruitment stage, is the responsibility of the Head of College Services who manages a review team of support staff and who reports to the College Director. Meetings between Heads of College Services enable the level of support provided to be monitored across Kaplan International Pathways Colleges.

2.40 At the operational level, the Programme Committee is responsible for developing and monitoring the quality of learning opportunities including the provision of resources and support to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Oversight of student support rests with JAMB.

2.41 Guidance and support for students begins at the admissions stage when they are supplied with extensive pre-arrival information and an accommodation guide. The induction programme is specifically designed to prepare students for study in the UK. During their programme of study, student attendance is closely monitored and students are contacted if they have unexplained absences.

2.42 During the admissions process students are able to disclose any specific learning needs. This will be discussed with the College and the University to ensure that the necessary support can be provided. Students confirm that they are able to discuss specific learning needs and that academic guidance and support is tailored to meet the needs of individual students.

2.43 The College has recently revised the tutorial system and introduced a series of weekly, subject-based, monitored self-study workshops to provide additional learning opportunities. Students are able to work individually or in project review teams. The subject-specialist teacher present at the tutorial is able to respond to student needs. Students and staff confirmed that the revised tutorial system had enhanced the support available to students.

2.44 The College identifies students who are at risk through monitoring their performance and attendance. These students were originally discussed at SMT meetings. However, to ensure that each case is given appropriate consideration and effective action is taken, the College has set up a separate Concerns Group, which reports directly to the SMT. The formation of the Concerns Group, which identifies students who may be at risk of not progressing, and which discusses, implements and reviews appropriate action to support the students is identified as **good practice**.

2.45 Students are supported in their transition to the University through the close cooperation between the College and the University. Throughout their studies at the College, students are able to access the specialist resources of the University such as science and engineering laboratories. Minutes of JAMB and JSMB identify areas for curriculum development and ensure that the College pathways provide the necessary subject and academic support for progression to the University programmes. Progression weeks organised by the University and College enable students to meet their University tutors and other students who are already studying at the University. Following graduation, the College tracks alumni student performance to identify where additional support could be provided to current students. Students who do not meet the entry criteria for their chosen course at the University can use the Kaplan International Pathways University Placement Service which supports them to find an alternative University programme.

2.46 The review team concludes that the comprehensive support and resources which have an international focus and are tailored to individual needs, enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, and to successfully progress to their University pathway, and there are extensive processes in place for oversight and monitoring of these services through Kaplan International Pathways and the University. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**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**

2.47 The College is responsible for student engagement based on Kaplan International Pathways policy, detailed in the ASQM. Colleges appoint and train Lead Student Representatives to gather views of other students, and disseminate information. A summary of the findings of student feedback is included in the APRs, which are considered by the Programme Committees. Kaplan uses various methods for eliciting student feedback including focus groups, formal staff and student forums, use of student representatives on Programme Committees, student representatives' feedback to senior management, feedback boxes, and email surveys and questionnaires. This feedback is reviewed and acted upon through the APRs. Kaplan International Pathways reviews these methods to gain feedback regularly. For example, survey questions were adjusted after consultation with alumni. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.48 To test the operation of these arrangements, the review team examined the ASQM, the College's APRs, the student submission, the minutes of the student representatives' committee and other meetings. The review team also met staff and student representatives.

2.49 The College fully supports widespread student engagement in the management of the quality of learning opportunities. The Programme Committees and the JSMB terms of reference allow for student membership and the College has taken deliberate steps to support widespread student engagement mainly through student representatives and student surveys. Students are able to contribute formally and informally to the enhancement of their educational experience and quality assurance.

2.50 The formal approach involves the student representatives, who confirm that their role and conduct has been thoroughly explained to them. They have a high profile through well designed notice-boards and meet regularly with a standard agenda to consider strengths and issues at the College. Alumni also contribute their opinion. Students complete end-of-module and end-of-programme surveys.

2.51 The Student Experience survey informs the College Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Although the College has deliberately decided not to include student representation on committees, the Programme Committee develops an action plan based on the results of student surveys and items from the student representatives' meeting. SMT meeting minutes confirm that the College SMT focuses on enhancement of the student experience. JAMB has oversight of responses to student opinion.

2.52 The College is responsive to students' concerns through informal channels such as tutorials and a regular 'Director's Lunch'. The students and alumni met by the review team spoke very positively about the College's approach to resolving issues and its provision of a supportive atmosphere. Students can express their views informally in discussion with teaching staff and senior management. Students confirm that the College recognises the importance of student feedback. They gave examples of actions the College had taken in response to their concerns, including VLE induction, skills for study assessments and preparation for the mathematics examination. Students also participate in selection procedures of new teaching staff.

2.53 The review team concludes that the College has a clear view of its approach to student engagement and offers a supportive environment with an accessible senior review team. There is evidence that the College values and responds to the students' contributions and has taken deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning**

**Findings**

2.54 The ASQM describes the assessment principles together with the regulations, moderation processes, assignment submission, marking procedures and feedback mechanisms. It specifies the minimum requirements for successful completion of modules and programmes, and how individual module marks are awarded and aggregated at programme and module levels. There are standardised templates for assessment board agenda and minutes. CLIQ provides support for Colleges in implementing these assessment processes. For example, it has produced an Assessment Development Guide and disseminates information to Colleges through the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Newsletter. Kaplan International Pathways provides extensive development on student assessment for College teaching staff to ensure that student performance is equitably judged. Kaplan International Pathways' academic rules, regulations and procedures would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.55 To test the operation of these arrangements the review team scrutinised relevant regulations, policy and strategy documents, minutes of meetings, an assessment board, and external examiner comments and reports. The review team met staff and students and viewed an example of assessment-related information for students in assessment guides and on the VLE.

2.56 The College has effective processes of assessment that specifically follow Kaplan International Pathways' policies and regulations. Internal verification and moderation processes together with external scrutiny support Assessment Board decisions.

2.57 Students receive assessment information during induction and on the VLE. They say they understand the regulations and know where to find the details. During class sessions, tutors provide the students with guidance on how to meet the requirements of the assessment. The assessment briefs and marking schemes are very clear.

2.58 There are a wide range of assessment methods including examinations, reports and group projects based on current scenarios and topics. External examiners confirm that this balance ensures fairness and equity and enables individual students to achieve their potential. The College encourages its staff to develop an innovative attitude towards assessment with many opportunities for staff development in this area. This creative approach to assessment is illustrated by the piloting of an online platform for assessing mathematics as used by the University, and the design and implementation of a colour-coded feedback matrix which enables students to understand the basis on which academic judgements are made. This individualised and systematic feedback on assessment, which enables students to understand the basis on which academic judgements are made, is identified as **good practice**.

2.59 Students are very positive about assessment feedback, which they say is thoroughly structured and developmental. Students also commend the approachability and

support provided by all their teaching staff, including the provision of regular, systematic and detailed one-to-one feedback on assessment. External examiners confirm this supportive feedback which prepares the students for their studies at the University.

2.60 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

## **Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.**

### **Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

#### **Findings**

2.61 Kaplan International Pathways has explicit policies and regulations for the appointment of independent external examiners. The ASQM defines their role and responsibilities. Colleges appoint the external examiners for their programmes. One external examiner operating across all Colleges is responsible for the English Language Exit module.

2.62 External examiners report to Colleges using a common Kaplan International Pathways template. They are required to analyse, reflect and comment upon the standards and quality of programmes as determined by student performance and on the appropriateness of the assessment process. The report sections cover academic standards, assessment processes, comparability of standards with other similar institutions and good practice. External examiners are required to attend Assessment Boards where formal decisions are made on the conferment of awards. Kaplan International Pathways' policies and oversight procedures ensures that external examiners' reports are carefully considered and responded to by the College.

2.63 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.64 To test the operation of these arrangements the review team examined documentation including Kaplan International Pathways policies and procedures, ASQP, APRs and external examiners' reports, JAMB minutes and terms of reference. The team also met staff (from the College, Kaplan International Pathways and the University) and students to establish the use made of external examiners by the College.

2.65 The College has an external examiner for each of its two subject areas, which secures academic standards. They are appointed according to the criteria defined in the ASQM and are confirmed by JAMB. This appointment procedure demonstrates that they are able to give impartial and independent advice on the assessment processes, the academic standards and student achievement.

2.66 The external examiners receive assignment briefs and questions in advance to confirm the academic level of the assessments. The external examiners receive a sample of the examination scripts to scrutinise, they meet students and teaching staff, and they attend the Assessment Board, where they give a verbal report on student achievement and the assessment practices.

2.67 The external examiner reports show that external examiners are satisfied that the assessment methods used are suitable for accurately assessing the performance of students and their appropriate progression to University-level programmes, they receive sufficient information on assessment, and that assessment procedure and practices are appropriate. All student transcripts are available electronically.

2.68 The Academic Director responds to the external examiners' comments, which are then reviewed by the Programme Committee. Teaching staff confirm that they use the external examiners' comments to improve their teaching and assessment and any responses are included in a programme's Action Plan. The Academic Director summarises the comments for the students, which are then widely available on the VLE, the assessment notice-board and in hard copy.

2.69 External examiners' reports are considered formally by the College through the annual monitoring procedure and by the University through JAMB.

2.70 The review team concludes that the College follows Kaplan International Pathways' procedures, makes scrupulous use of external examiners, and uses their reports to ensure comparability of the student learning. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**



**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**

2.71 ASQM provides the framework for the systematic monitoring and review of programmes for assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. APQC has strategic oversight of the outcomes of all Colleges' programme monitoring and reviews to ensure the enhancement and the parity of student experience. At the College the Programme Committee approves the APR, which is received by the College SMT, JAMB and the external examiners. Any changes arising from the Kaplan International Pathways Curriculum Review (Product Review) will be implemented from the beginning of academic year 2019-20. The review team found that Kaplan International Pathways has appropriate policies in place for the monitoring and review of its programmes in order to maintain standards and enhance the quality of learning opportunities. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.72 To test the operation of these arrangements the review team examined policy documents and templates, and read monitoring and review reports, action plans and committee minutes. The review team also met staff from the College, Kaplan International Pathways and the University, and students.

2.73 The College operates effective, regular and systematic processes for programme monitoring to assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities. The College follows the University's requirements for periodic review of the programmes. The College's Academic Director completes the College's APR and its Action Plan. The APR template requires both quantitative and qualitative information relating to the programmes. There is a matrix of quality assurance and enhancement activities, data of student success and achievement and the programme's challenges and progression, together with comments on the student experience survey and excerpts from the external examiners' reports.

2.74 The College clearly considers that students are a primary source of information about the programmes on which they are studying and solicits their opinions both formally and informally. The Student Representatives' meetings and the Student Experience surveys demonstrate that the College actively seeks feedback from students about their learning experience. The College APR Action Plan contains a recommendation taken directly from the Student Experience Survey and from the external examiners' reports.

2.75 Staff complete an end-of-module survey and contribute to annual monitoring through the Programme Committees, for example through their recommendation for a change in tutorial provision.

2.76 The Programme Committee thoroughly scrutinises the APR and monitors student progression and retention data, including student achievement when at the University. JAMB then receives the annual programme reports and recommendations for changes. A recent JAMB reported that the APR is detailed and well-presented with the key identification of actions to improve results and progression.

2.77 The review team concludes that the arrangements, including regular oversight by Kaplan International Pathways and the University, ensure the operation of systematic and regular processes for monitoring the quality of the students' learning opportunities. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**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**

2.78 Kaplan International Pathways has procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints, which are set out in the ASQM and apply to all its UK Pathway Colleges. The procedures make provision for both informal and formal complaints and set out a staged process for considering complaints, including escalation to higher authorities should the complainant not be satisfied with the outcome. Colleges are required to inform students about the complaints procedure on the VLE and in programme handbooks. There is an online complaint form. These detailed procedures relating to complaints and appeals, set out in the ASQM, would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.79 To test the operation of the arrangements the team reviewed the Kaplan International Pathways' procedures relating to complaints and appeals and scrutinised the information made available by the College to students that relates to the complaints and appeals process including appeals about admissions. The review team also met staff and students.

2.80 Formal complaints are dealt with by the Head of College Services and if necessary referred to the College Director. If students are not happy with the outcome they can put their concerns in writing to the Director of Colleges. Responses to complaints should be made within five working days.

2.81 Colleges are required to keep a log of formal complaints and their outcomes, which is reviewed by the College SMT to assess any trends or issues. This is then reviewed by the Kaplan International Pathways SMT. Appeals normally have to be lodged within three days of an Assessment Board. Where an initial settlement through discussion with the Academic Director cannot be agreed an appeals panel is convened. The procedures for complaints and appeals now include a requirement for students to be informed in writing about the outcome of a formal appeal or complaint. This responds to the recommendation made following the 2016 HER (EC).

2.82 Information about how to make a complaint or lodge an appeal is available on the VLE. This includes access to the relevant forms for a complaint or an appeal, and sets out clear guidelines about the stages of a complaint or an appeal, and the timeframe for a response.

2.83 Students met by the review team confirmed that they are aware of how to make a complaint and that this information is given to them during the induction process. They are also aware of the procedure for appealing about an assessment decision and had been made aware of how to appeal against an admissions decision.

2.84 The College encourages the resolution of complaints through an informal process. In relation to academic appeals, students are made aware of the process and the grounds on which they can appeal. Where there are grounds for an appeal and a settlement cannot be offered, or is not accepted, an Academic Appeals Panel is convened.

2.85 Students can make a complaint by discussing their concerns informally with their tutor, or can go directly to College Services. Formal complaints are made via an online form which is sent directly to the Head of Student Services.

2.86 The review team concludes that the College makes effective use of the central Kaplan International Pathways' procedures for the handling and resolution of academic appeals and complaints about the quality of learning opportunities. Students confirm that these procedures are fair and accessible and responses are timely. Oversight by JAMB provides an external reference point for decisions about complaints. It also provides an opportunity for enhancement of the learning opportunities to be implemented in response to the outcomes of complaints and appeals. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.87 In reaching its judgement, the review team considered its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.88 All Expectations in this judgement area are met, and the associated level of risk is low in all cases.

2.89 The review team identified several areas of good practice in this Judgement area: The use of peer-assisted learning and personal achievement portfolios, which enables students to develop as independent learners. The use of the specialised mathematics software by teaching staff, which supports science and engineering students in their progression to the University. The effective linking of study skills to subject disciplines, which supports students to better communicate and operate within their chosen field, and which provides an opportunity to broaden the curriculum. The formation of a Concerns Group, which identifies students who may be at risk of not progressing. Reporting directly to the Senior Management Team, the Group discusses, implements and reviews appropriate action to support the students. The individualised and systematic feedback on assessment, including, for example, the design and implementation of a colour-coded matrix, which enables students to understand the basis on which academic judgements are made.

2.90 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the provider is **commended**.

### **3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities**

**Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.**

#### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

##### **Findings**

3.1 The agreements between the University and Kaplan International Pathways include arrangements for the provision of public information. All information for students and other stakeholders requires approval by the University. The use of the University trademark is also covered in the agreements, together with intellectual property rights.

3.2 Kaplan International Pathways has a nine-stage process for producing and signing off information contained in the prospectus. This includes design, content and checking the use of the University and Kaplan logos.

3.3 These arrangements for managing the provision of information and to ensure that it is reliable and trustworthy would enable the Expectation to be met.

3.4 To test the operation of these arrangements the review team scrutinised the information available to students in hard copy, on the website and on the VLE, and discussed the arrangements with staff and students.

3.5 Kaplan International Pathways uses the centrally managed Higher Education Course Management (HECM) system to capture information about all pathways and their progression routes. A Product Catalogue is being developed that will provide a more effective link between the various information management systems, including the course content library, which holds programme specifications, information on the VLE and progression routes. This is part of the revised IT strategy.

3.6 Information for prospective students and other stakeholders is provided through the Kaplan International Pathways' website and the College prospectus.

3.7 The Kaplan International Pathways' website has a direct link to the University of the West of England, Bristol's website. The design and badging of information produced for the College reflects the brand image of the University.

3.8 Details of the international pathway programme and the University programme to which students can progress is included in the offer letter that is sent to successful applicants. Students are provided with an Accommodation Guide and a Pre-Arrival Guide. These documents are also available on the College website.

3.9 Students confirm that the information they receive prior to joining the College enables them to make a decision about whether or not to accept the offer made to them.

3.10 The Student Handbook is available through the VLE and contains information about the College and the University. It includes information about living and studying in the UK and signposts students to other more specialist sources of information. A code of conduct, which sets out the expected behaviour for students, is provided during induction. Programme

Handbooks are available on the VLE. These include the programme structure and module specifications. Students indicated that they also receive a paper copy of the course structure during induction and are given guides for each module.

3.11 The Handbooks are produced by the College using the Kaplan International Pathways template and are checked for accuracy by the College Director and then by CLIQ to ensure that they align with the information contained in the programme specifications and the library. Staff confirmed that they have an input into the content of the handbooks.

3.12 On completion of their programme students receive a transcript from Kaplan International Pathways setting out the modules they have passed.

3.13 Feedback from students about the information they receive from the College is collected through the Arrival Survey and the Module Questionnaire. The accuracy and appropriateness of information provided by the College is also discussed at meetings with student representatives.

3.14 Students met by the review team confirmed that they receive detailed and helpful information about their course. The College posts feedback from externals and assessment regulations throughout the College, which provides an immediate reference point for students. The provision of concise and accessible information, in poster format, relating to assessment regulations and feedback from external examiners, which enables students to have an immediate understanding of the regulations and comments from external examiners, is **good practice**.

3.15 The review team concludes that the College has effective systems in place to ensure that the information provided to its intended audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The University and Kaplan International Pathways maintain oversight of the information provided by the College. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

3.16 In reaching its judgement, the review team considered its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.17 The Expectation in this judgement area is met, and the associated level of risk is low.

3.18 Published information for the College is produced in accordance with Kaplan International Pathways' procedures, which involve a staged process for production and approval, and provide standard templates for documentation. The College works with the University and Kaplan International Pathways on the production and approval of information, and Kaplan International Pathways and the University maintain oversight. At the time of the visit, Kaplan International Pathways was engaged in a review that aimed to ensure improved links between its various information systems including a course information library. Students indicated that the information they received prior to joining had been accurate and had assisted them in decision-making. The College has processes in place for evaluating the effectiveness of published information, and student views are considered as part of this.

3.19 The review team found that there are appropriate procedures in place for ensuring that published information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.20 The review team identified an area of good practice in this judgement area: The provision of concise and accessible information, in poster format, relating to assessment regulations and feedback from external examiners that enables students to have an immediate understanding of the regulations and comments from external examiners.

3.21 The review team concludes that the quality of the information produced by the provider about its provision **meets** UK expectations.



## 4 Commentary on the enhancement of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.**

### Findings

4.1 The strategic approach to enhancement is led and driven by the Kaplan International Pathways SMT, which ensures that both centralised and College-level initiatives lead to improvements. Kaplan International Pathways uses a wide range of quality review processes to identify opportunities for enhancement and Colleges are encouraged and supported to share good practice. CLIQ plays an important role in supporting both central and College-level projects. Integrated initiatives include the Kaplan Assessment Development Guide and the introduction of the VLE as a host for assessment questions and the student forum.

4.2 The College continues this strategic approach to enhancement that is led from the College SMT. Committee structures and annual monitoring processes ensure that quality enhancement is embedded within the College. The College actively promotes opportunities to students, staff and other stakeholders to feed back on services and make suggestions for enhancement. Students are clearly able to influence the cycle of enhancement through the Programme Committees and by giving formal and informal feedback. In addition, students are able to articulate examples of where changes have been made as a result of student feedback, for example the introduction of the new tutorial system for which a new approach was agreed for the academic year 2017-18. A series of weekly, subject-based, monitored self-study workshops was established to provide additional learning opportunities to students. The subject-specialist teacher present is able to pick up and respond to needs of individuals and groups of students. Students are able to work individually or in project review teams.

4.3 There is a systematic approach to staff development that encourages staff to be proactive in recognising the College's and their own development needs. There are monthly sharing good practice staff sessions.

## 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.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer Glossary on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/glossary).

### Academic standards

The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

### Award

A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

### Awarding organisation

An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

### Blended learning

Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

### Credit(s)

A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

### Degree-awarding body

A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

### Distance learning

A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'. See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### 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.

### **Multiple awards**

An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

### **Operational definition**

A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

### **Programme (of study)**

An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

### **Programme specifications**

Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

### **Quality Code**

Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

### **Reference points**

Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

### **Self-evaluation document**

A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

### **Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

### **Threshold academic standard**

The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

### **Widening participation**

Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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