Kaplan International Colleges UK Ltd

Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

June 2015

Annex 6: Nottingham Trent International College

Introduction and background

Nottingham Trent International College (the College) was established in 2005. It is an embedded College within the Kaplan International College's (KIC) pathway network, in partnership with Nottingham Trent University (the University). Students achieving the required grades proceed directly to a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered by the University. In 2013-14, 35 per cent of the University's international students were graduates from the College. In 2014-15, the College had an increase of 26.9 per cent in student numbers.

A Joint Strategic Management Board (JSMB) is responsible for the strategic relationship between the University and the College. At KIC, there is a Senior Management Team (SMT) supported by the College Executive Management Board, which includes Directors of all Kaplan colleges. The Academic Planning and Quality Committee is responsible for the overall management of academic standards and quality.

Students submitted a video file as evidence for the review team on the student experience at the College. This provided the review team with information which was followed up in meetings with students and staff during the visit.

Key findings

Academic standards

There can be **confidence** that academic standards at the embedded College are managed appropriately and in accordance with the policies and procedures of Kaplan International Colleges UK Ltd.

Quality of learning opportunities

There can be **confidence** that the quality of learning opportunities at the embedded College is assured and enhanced appropriately and in accordance with the policies and procedures of Kaplan International Colleges UK Ltd.

Information about learning opportunities

Reliance can be placed on the information that the embedded College produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Good practice

The review team noted the following features of **good practice**:

- the detailed procedures for setting and moderating assessments and the College-level overview of the processes (paragraph 14)
- the thorough embedding of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) across College activities (paragraphs 15 and 29)
- the extracurricular learning opportunities including the Knowledge Hub at Global Point and the Learning Outside the Classroom Programme (paragraph 38)
- the effective induction of students including the support for late arrivals and the monitoring and follow-up activities during the first six weeks (paragraph 41)
- the effective partnership with Nottingham Trent University at both strategic and operational levels (paragraph 42).

Recommendation

The review team makes the following recommendation in relation to this College.

The team considers that it would be **desirable** for the College to:

- ensure externality in processes for programme approval and review (paragraph 5).

Detailed findings

How effectively does KIC and the College fulfil responsibilities for the management of academic standards at the College?

1   KIC operates a central Academic Planning and Quality Committee (APQC) as its senior body for academic affairs including standards. The Committee is chaired by the Director of Student Learning and has the role of establishing, monitoring and reviewing academic standards using procedures and policies outlined in a Quality Academic Framework (QAF) and detailed in the Academic Standards and Quality Manual (ASQM). In addition, at a more local level, a Joint Academic Advisory Board (JAAB) chaired by a Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University and with membership drawn from both the College and the University, maintains joint University/College oversight in ensuring that the College's academic standards are appropriate for progression to the University. This Board gives academic approval to changes in curriculum, progression requirements, entry requirements and new programmes.

2   Responsibility for implementing the QAF rests at College level with the College's Academic Director. Programme committees are in place for each programme and report to the College's Senior Management Team (SMT). KIC's Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality (CLIQ) plays a key role across all the KIC embedded colleges including the College, and in terms of standards, acts as a hub to ensure a common identity and set of standards across the network.

3   Standards are set at the point of programme development. This follows a detailed process including both discussion of market viability and academic issues. Initial scrutiny is through the New Programme Development and Approval Group which looks at sales, marketing, financial and compliance issues prior to full development and approval from an academic perspective. The latter, for both new programmes and new modules, takes place through the APQC and approval is also sought from the prospective partner university via the JAAB. The current academic year has seen the introduction of a new programme leading to degree level study in petroleum engineering at either the University of Salford or

the University of Aberdeen. Documentation provided to the review team showed that the process described in the ASQM had been followed. The College states that this process allows for a system of peer review to take place. However, while it involves comment from other KIC colleges and from the partner University there is no requirement for an independent external view to be sought.

4   A periodic programme review process is undertaken every five years by the College to ensure that programmes remain valid and fit for purpose. If a periodic review is undertaken by, or jointly with, the University this replaces the KIC process. The KIC review process is led by the College's Academic Director and examines an extensive range of evidence including annual programme reports for the period concerned. As with the approval process, there is no requirement for an independent external view to be sought.

5   An annual programme report is produced at the end of each academic year evaluating evidence gathered during that year including student statistics, student feedback and external examiners' reports. Actions to be taken in the following year are noted. The report is produced by the programme leader, received by the programme committee (which includes student membership), approved by the College's Senior Management Group and submitted to CLIQ by December of the relevant year. The report is also received by the JAAB and by the programme external examiner.

6   Together with the care taken in the management of student assessment, the processes above ensure that the College effectively fulfils its responsibilities for the management of academic standards. However, it would be **desirable** for the College to ensure externality in the processes for programme approval and review.

How effective is the management of student assessment?

7   The ASQM provides clear guidance on the whole of the assessment process including penalties for late submission and the treatment of students with disabilities and those offering mitigating circumstances.

8   The College is responsible for the development of all summative and formative assessments for modules on the programmes it offers with the exception of summative assessments on a language module (Language for Study 3), which are set and managed centrally by the KIC Assessment Team. The relevant programme committee is responsible for ensuring an effective assessment strategy is in place and that robust quality assurance procedures operate in the development and conduct of assessments.

9   With the exception of the language module referred to above, assessments and mark schemes are designed by the module leader. There is an extensive and iterative internal review process involving the programme leader, the English for Academic Purposes leader (who comments on the appropriateness of the language for students at this level) and the College's Academic Director. After this is complete and any adjustments have been made, all assessments are sent to the relevant external examiner for comment prior to being given to the students.

10   Students reported that assignment briefs and the associated assessment criteria were clear. The ASQM states that assessed coursework is normally marked and returned to students within 10 working days of the submission deadline, and students met by the team confirmed that this was the case.

11   Blind double-marking is carried out on a sample of all assessments with the sample normally being based on the square root of the cohort size, unless the cohort is particularly small. In the case of a significant discrepancy, a third marker will be involved to moderate. One external examiner's report expressed concern that there appeared to be no difference

between the marks of first and second examiners. This had been investigated by the College and was explained as occurring because the examiners did not record their discussion leading to a single agreed mark. A form has now been introduced to ensure that reasons for mark changes are documented. External examiners have the opportunity to see and comment on a sample of scripts, normally covering at least 10 per cent of the cohort of students from each assessment.

12   Assessment Boards are held each term to check the consistency and fairness of assessment processes and to make decisions on student progression and award. External examiners are invited to attend each Assessment Board and expected to attend at least once per year.

13   Staff are extensively supported in their assessment role by the College and the CLIQ, which provides workshops on assessment, including topics such as assessment design strategy. CLIQ has also produced the KIC Assessment Guide, which outlines the guiding principles for assessment in all KIC's colleges and suggests how these should be implemented.

14   The detailed procedures for setting and moderating assessments and the College-level overview of the processes is **good practice.**

Where appropriate, how effectively are UK external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

15   The College refers to a number of external reference points in the management of its provision. KIC has a policy of ensuring that the Quality Code is embedded in its work. For example, the QAF and the ASQM use the Code as a key reference point and the ASQM provides a summary of the principles and purposes of the Code. In particular, the College action plan, using a template provided centrally by KIC, not only links actions to their source (annual review, external examiners' comments), lists the actions to be taken and notes documentary evidence that these have occurred, but directly links these actions into the relevant part of the Quality Code. This thorough embedding of the Quality Code across College activities is **good practice**.

16   Programme specifications relate explicitly to the appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements and articulate with the receiving programme at the University. College programmes are designed to ensure successful transition from College to University.

17   *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) is used as an external reference point in the design and review of all KIC programmes and has been used to design the College's own qualifications framework. The language in which learning outcomes are expressed is such as to indicate the relevant level as specified by the FHEQ. English language provision is related to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

How effectively are external examining, moderation, or verification used to assure academic standards?

18   At least one external examiner must be appointed to each programme with a national external examiner appointed to the Language for Study 3 module which is common across the network. With the exception of the latter, external examiners are nominated by programme leaders with the nomination approved by the JAAB. Care is taken to avoid conflicts of interest. CLIQ maintains a register of all KIC external examiners, and colleges notify CLIQ prior to confirmation of a new appointment in order to be aware of any potential conflicts of interest. The appointment is normally for four reporting cycles.

19   The programme leader arranges an induction for new examiners and they are supported by a comprehensive handbook giving information about KIC and the College and detailing the rights and responsibilities of the examiner.

20   Detailed processes exist for the verification of assessments and the moderation of marks. As indicated at paragraphs 10 to 13, examiners see and comment on all assessments prior to their release to students. They receive a sample of marked work and must attend at least one assessment board per year. They report to the College annually using a standard form, normally within two weeks of the summer assessment board. The programme leader is responsible for providing a formal response to the report. The external examiner also has the right to submit to the KIC Director of Student Learning a confidential report on matters of particular importance or sensitivity. Examples were provided of the College taking action following comments from its external examiners.

21   Overall, the College is effective in its use of external examining, moderation, or verification used to assure academic standards.

How effectively is statistical information used to monitor and assure academic standards?

22   Recruitment, enrolment, attendance, completion and progression data is collected and used to assess course quality with figures appearing in annual course reports. The statistics are followed by a discussion of issues and recommendations for action to be taken. Trend data can also be displayed over several years.

23   Student performance at partner universities is considered a key performance indicator by KIC, and the College is now receiving data on the progress of those of its alumni who have transferred to the University. Such data is also considered in the annual programme report.

How effectively are responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities fulfilled?

24   KIC effectively manages the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities at the strategic level through rigorous policies and procedures set out in the QAF and the ASQM. The College's robust management and committee structures ensure that these policies and procedures are implemented at the operational level. Programme leaders manage and monitor programmes, reporting to the Academic Director. Programmes are evaluated and reviewed through annual programme reports which are considered by programme committees and then combined into a College annual programme report which identifies areas for improvement and records good practice. The College annual programme report is reviewed at the strategic level by JAAB, which includes members of both the University and College staff. A summary of the action points and areas of good practice from the College annual programme report is considered by KIC enabling comparisons to be made about the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities across all Colleges.

25   CLIQ supports effective student learning across KIC programmes. The recent curriculum review carried out by CLIQ undertook an analysis of student achievement and feedback from stakeholders, and resulted in significant changes to the curriculum content and structure. Changes include shortening the delivery and assessments of all modules to one term rather than two to help students to focus for concentrated periods on small numbers of subjects, studied concurrently. The College has used the KIC Grade Descriptors to enhance its assessment processes and a revised Learning and Teaching Framework, aligned to the generic framework developed by CLIQ, is being embedded into the College's pathways.

26   Learning opportunities are continually reviewed and enhanced through the College action plan which captures action required in response to commentary from external reviews and feedback from staff and students.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?

27   The College effectively uses a range of external reference points to manage and enhance learning opportunities. The analysis of student performance once they have progressed to the University acts as an external reference for the College, confirming that it is effectively preparing students for transition to the University. Further analysis is being undertaken through a joint action research project to identify why some students perform more effectively on their degree programmes with the aim of addressing the needs of those who perform less well.

28   The common descriptors and guiding principles in the Kaplan UK Pathways Learning and Teaching Framework help to ensure consistency across all KIC provision. External examiners, appointed for each College programme, provide commentary on student learning opportunities and ensure parity with other providers.

29   The Expectations of the Quality Code are clearly identified in the College's policies and procedures and have been embedded in the development of an ongoing action plan which captures and records enhancement activities across the College. As outlined in paragraph 15, the review team considers that the thorough embedding of the Code across College activities is good practice.

30   The Higher Education Academy (HEA) UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education is effectively used as a further external reference point and several members of College staff are Fellows of the HEA.

How effectively do KIC and the College assure themselves that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

31   The College makes effective use of internal procedures and external commentary to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is maintained and enhanced. The Academic Director of Teaching and Learning is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the curriculum. Senior sessional tutors act as mentors to support new sessional tutors and module coordinators oversee the delivery of modules and the setting of assessment.

32   The outcomes of teaching observations inform the appraisal process and identify staff development needs. Peer review enables teaching and administrative staff to observe one another and gain a better understanding of how the different roles can contribute to enhancing the student learning experience.

33   Enhancements to teaching and assessment have been made in response to external examiner comments, and all assessments now identify clear marking criteria against which tutors provide feedback. Internal moderation, verification and standardisation meetings provide an opportunity for staff to share best practice in setting and marking assessment. The Best Practice Day introduced in 2013 enables College staff to discuss innovations in learning and teaching with staff from other Kaplan International Colleges.

How effectively is student feedback used to assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities?

34   The College provides students with an extensive range of opportunities to give feedback, and rigorously uses their comments to enhance the quality of learning

opportunities. Student representatives are elected during induction week and are given training to help them effectively fulfil their role. They act as a first point of contact for students, meet weekly as a group and attend programme committee meetings. Students indicated that changes had been made to both the content and delivery of the curriculum in response to their feedback. The College provides details of action taken in response to student feedback via a regularly updated 'You said - we did' poster on the virtual learning environment. The University Students' Union supports the College student representatives with a programme of social events.

35   Students evaluate the learning and teaching of modules through questionnaires and complete end-of-programme surveys. The responses are analysed and the outcomes contribute to annual programme monitoring and are considered by programme committees. The tutorial system provides an opportunity for students to give weekly feedback on an informal basis.

How effectively do KIC and the College assure themselves that students are supported effectively?

36   The College continually reviews the effectiveness of the support provided for students through attendance monitoring, analysis of student achievement and progression data, and through feedback from students and staff. Mid-term reviews identify students who require extra support and this is provided through tutorials or additional skills training. Personal tutors offer academic support on a one-to-one basis through regular meetings with students.

37   KIC's policy of small class sizes enables staff to monitor students closely and identify any further support they may need. Review weeks at the end of the teaching session offer help with assessment. Progression events run by University staff during review weeks provide information about University pathways. The small number of students who are not progressing to the University use its Placement System Service to find suitable progression routes.

38   The College provides an extensive range of additional support through the Learning Outside the Classroom Programme and in the Knowledge Hub at the Student Residence (Global Point), including access to tutors during evenings and weekends. This programme of additional learning activities is continually reviewed and enhanced to ensure that students are effectively supported. The extracurricular learning opportunities, including the Knowledge Hub at Global Point and the Learning Outside the Classroom Programme is **good practice**. Students told the review team that they found these experiences enriching and enjoyable.

39   The College closely supports its under-18 students. They are accommodated in specially designated areas of student residences, are given personal alarms, have access to mentors and are contacted by a student support officer on a weekly basis.

How effectively does the College manage the recruitment and admission of students?

40   The College recruits students through the robust recruitment and admissions system which is managed centrally by KIC. Students access information from the website and are provided with a hard copy of the accommodation and pre-arrival guides. Students are given detailed information about the pathway they will follow at the College and about the programme they will progress to at the University or an alternative Kaplan partner university. These are the Universities of Aberdeen, Birmingham, Brighton, Glasgow, Liverpool, Salford, Sheffield, York, Westminster, Bournemouth University, City University

London, Cranfield University, Nottingham Trent University and UWE Bristol. Prior to admission, they have access to a number of short videos about the College and are able to make direct contact with staff and students to find out more about the College and the pathway they wish to study.

41 Students follow a rigorous week-long induction programme with follow-up activities and meetings with tutors during the first term. They are provided with detailed student and programme handbooks. The induction week includes tours of the College and University campuses, an introduction to the library, and the local bookshop, an overview of the modules to be studied and a comprehensive programme of social events. Students who arrive late are given one-to-one induction, and have access to all the information provided during induction week. During the first six weeks of study, all students are closely monitored. The tutorial system and attendance monitoring enables the College to provide specific support for those students needing help to settle into the College. Students spoke positively about the value of the induction process in helping them settle into the College and the UK. The effective induction of students including the support for late arrivals and the monitoring and follow-up activities during the first six weeks is **good practice**.

What are the arrangements for staff development to maintain and/or enhance the quality of learning opportunities?

42 College staff are able to access an extensive range of staff development activities organised by KIC, the University and the College, which includes secondment to central units such as CLIQ. The College is currently undertaking a skills audit to identify specific areas for development. A weekly staff development programme is scheduled in non-teaching slots, and linked to the outcomes of teaching observations and appraisal. Full-time and sessional staff are expected to attend these events. Staff participate in the University learning and teaching conference where they have co-presented with colleagues from the University. Liaison with University departmental staff helps to strengthen the development of their subject areas. The staff development links and the efficient management processes demonstrate the effective partnership with the College at both strategic and operational levels, which is **good practice**.

How effectively does the College ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes?

43 The College provides a variety of learning resources for students, which effectively support them to achieve the intended learning outcomes for their programmes of study. There is a computer room in which appropriate software is installed to support the computing pathway, and students are able to access site licences for the software they need. The College and the University's contractual arrangements enable students to use the library. The College regularly reviews the University library stock to ensure that it is up-to-date and supports new areas of provision such as the recently developed Engineering and Petroleum pathway with Aberdeen University. Students confirmed that they regularly use the University library. A local book shop stocks copies of key texts. The student virtual learning environment provides additional resources and is currently undergoing further development. The College has negotiated a reduced membership fee for a private library next to the student accommodation.

How effectively does KIP's public information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides at this College?

44 The College offers both hardcopy and website prospectuses which, in line with KIC policy, mirror the design and branding of the University. In addition, there are printed promotional leaflets, a parents' guide, a sponsors' guide, pre-arrival guide and information

about accommodation. On arrival at the College, students receive the student handbook, which includes information about regulations and requirements, such as attendance as well as details about the programme they will study.

45   Recent initiatives include a mobile phone application giving access to pre-arrival information and the use made of social media sites which is monitored and audited by the central Content and Marketing Team. Students informed the review team that the information they received had been clear, correct and useful, demonstrating the effectiveness of what is offered.

How effective are NTC's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing at this College?

46   Production of the prospectus and management of the website are the responsibility of KIC's central Content and Marketing Team with processes in place with the College to check for accuracy and completeness of information. The final version requires sign off by the University and this process was confirmed by staff from the University. The programme Handbook is produced by the College and approved by the Programme Committee. The majority of students are recruited by agents and KIC supplies regular updates and training for all of its agents to ensure that they give potential applicants accurate information and advice.

47   The current processes as described above are effective, although the team noted that a new process for document control had been introduced to further strengthen the approach. This new process applies to all marketing and student-facing information with the aim of making the arrangements for ensuring accuracy and completeness even more robust.

Action plan[1]

Kaplan International Colleges UK Ltd: Action plan relating to Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight (Nottingham Trent International College), June 2015						
Good practice	**Intended outcomes**	**Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes**	**Target date(s)**	**Action by**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation (process or evidence)**
The review team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the College:						
• the detailed procedures for setting and moderating assessments and the College level overview of the processes (paragraph 14)	Continue to maintain the procedures for setting and moderation of assessments and introducing improvements where possible To ensure that all current and especially new teaching staff are able to fulfil their role in this procedure	Introduction of a double marking sheet To develop and implement a training programme for all sessional and new permanent tutors which includes aspects of assessment	Completed By December 2015	Academic Director, Programme and Subject Leaders	College Strategy Team (CST)	Evidence of double marking sheets External examiners' reports Training plan Feedback from staff
• the thorough embedding of the Quality	Continue to ensure staff awareness of the Quality Code	Continue with sessions on the Quality Code and its relevance to College	By July 2016	Academic Director	CST	Staff development schedule

---

[1] The provider has been required to develop this action plan to follow up on good practice and address any recommendations arising from the review. QAA monitors progress against the action plan, in conjunction with the partner higher education institution.

Code across College activities (paragraphs 15 and 29)		acitvities during the Staff Development Programme Ensure that any new activities introduced in the College are also fully embedded and existing procedures reviewed in the light of updates to the Quality Code.				Documentation on any new initiatives
• the extracurricular learning opportunities including the Knowledge Hub at Global Point and the Learning Outside the Classroom Programme (paragraph 38)	To continue to develop extracurricular learning opportunities through both the Knowledge Hub and the Learning Outside the Classroom Programme	To develop an updated Programme of activities for the Knowledge Hub based on feedback from Sessional tutors and students who attended this last academic year	2015-16: To be reviewed in the light of feedback mid-programme and at the end	Coordinating Tutor and Academic Director	College Director, CST	Programme of activities Attendance registers Feedback from students and tutors
		To develop an updated programme for the Learning Outside the Classroom Programme based on observed student needs and tutor input	2015-16: To be reviewed for the new academic year and ongoing	Coordinating Tutor, Programme leaders and Academic Director	CST	Programme of activities Attendance registers Feedback from students and tutors
• the effective induction of students including the support for late arrivals and the	To ensure that new students arriving at the College are equipped and supported in engaging in all aspects of the course they are	Work towards improving existing systems including: Giving every student a paper copy of the Welcome Pack (as an alternative to the version	Induction week September 2015	Student Services Manager	CST	Evidence of paper Welcome Pack and sample letter

12

monitoring and follow-up activities during the first six weeks (paragraph 41)	enrolled on and life in Nottingham	previously made available on the VLE). It was identified that students were not always reading it so a paper copy will be given to ensure that it is accessible				
		A welcome letter from the College Director and a courtesy pack is to be put in each student's room (where they live in student residences). The letter to include details of events where the new student can meet other students	Induction week September 2015	Student Services Manager	CST	Feedback from students and staff on welcome week
		Review of new initiatives to measure their effectiveness	May 2015	Student Services Manager and Head of Administration and Business Support		Report of review
• the effective partnership with Nottingham Trent University at both strategic and operational levels (paragraph 42).	To continue to maintain and develop effective links with relevant Nottingham Trent University departments and activities	To continue to identify and set up links with academic liaison contacts in relevant schools and departments To continue the working relationship with the CADQ To continue involvement in	Ongoing	Academic Director, Programme Leaders All staff	CST CST	List of contacts developed and log of meetings set up Evidence of staff

		relevant conferences, staff training and other initiatives				development events and other events attended
		To continue the development of relationship with the Students' Union		Head of Administration and Business Support	CST	
Desirable	**Intended outcomes**	**Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes**	**Target date/s**	**Action by**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation (process or evidence)**
The team considers that it would be **desirable** for the College to:						
• ensure externality in processes for programme approval and review (paragraph 5).	To work towards externality for programme approval and review	To hold discussions with KIC and specifically CLIQ including the New Product Development and Approval Group Any agreed way forward to be taken to the University JSMB for agreement	Summer 2016	College Director and Director of Student Learning	Kaplan SMT	Minutes from CLIQ meetings Minutes from New Product and Approval Group Minutes from JSMB