



UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Advice and Guidance

Enabling Student Achievement



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Regulatory contexts for the Quality Code

The Quality Code articulates a set of principles that apply across the UK through four Expectations. These Expectations are then explained and contextualised through Core and Common practices in a way that allows institutions to demonstrate them. The Expectations, Core and Common practices are not regulatory requirements in England, but the Practices should be demonstrated by providers operating in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

National regulators and QAA are not bound by the information in this advice and guidance and will not view it as containing indicators of compliance. This guidance does not interpret statutory requirements.

Terminology

Transferable skills: Core skills and attributes developed from a range of experiences including education, the workplace, leisure activities, and personal and social situations, which can be applied to different settings. Descriptions of transferable skills that can be applied in a range of jobs and careers might include words such as, teamwork, problem identification and problem solving, and leadership.

Graduate attributes: Skills and qualities which higher education providers have identified that their graduates will have developed during their studies and through participation in student life. Listed attributes might include descriptions such as critical and reflective thinker, effective communicator, resilient and self-reliant.

Mental health and well-being: Mental health is a state of well-being where an individual realises their own abilities, has the resilience to cope with the common stresses of life, work productively and can contribute to their community.

Safeguarding: Safeguarding refers to higher education providers implementing and adhering to robust procedures, which ensure that their students are able to study and participate in student life in a safe and supportive environment.

Students: In relation to this Code, the term ‘student’ refers to all individuals studying a higher education course regardless of demographic, mode or level of study, subject area or geographic location.

Expectations and Practices

The advice underneath the Expectations and Practices is not mandatory for providers but illustrative of a range of possible approaches.

Success in higher education is instrumental for the academic, professional and personal development of students. This success can be measured in part by benchmarking against set outcomes. However, it can also be measured through the approach taken to continuously developing the student experience.

An effective approach to student support should encompass curriculum design and learning and teaching, working across all areas of provision. This approach includes active engagement with students and staff from across a provider to ensure the continual evaluation and development of the student experience. Effective student support will recognise the diverse needs of the student body and mitigate the potential adverse effects associated with challenging aspects of the student experience such as complaints, retention or progression.

Expectation for quality

From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.

Enabling student achievement encompasses a holistic approach to support throughout the entire student journey, from admission and transition into higher education, to completion and transition out of higher education. This Expectation does not specify 'academic success' and so it is worth noting that enabling student achievement does not comprise solely of academic support. This Expectation also makes clear reference to support that is accessible and inclusive of all students, but not the same for all students.

Core practices

- **The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.**
In practice, this means that staff who are highly skilled in meeting the learning and support needs of students are ensuring effective knowledge transfer which leads to students achieving successful outcomes.
- **The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.**
In practice, this means that the study/research environment, access to appropriate resources and wider student support are vital in providing a high quality academic and personal student experience.
- **The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.**
In practice, this means that effective academic support throughout the student journey and support that enables students to pursue a rewarding, professional career and positive academic outcomes.
- **The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.**
In practice, this means that embedding support mechanisms within the design and delivery of courses will enable staff to pre-empt and identify needs of students before it impacts retention and progression.
- **The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their education experience.**
In practice, this means that student engagement with support services is critical to better understand the individual and collective needs of students. It also signposts students to support mechanisms that their provider offers.

Common practice

- **The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.**
In practice, this means that the student and prospective student population is diverse and ever changing. This impacts the relevance and effectiveness of services to support student needs. Higher education providers should be responsive and able to evaluate and enhance support services to adapt to these needs.

Guiding principles

The guiding principles given here are not mandatory for any provider. They are a concise expression of the fundamental practices of the higher education sector, based on the experience of a wide range of providers. They are intended as a framework for providers to consider when establishing new or looking at existing higher education provision. They are not exhaustive and there will be other ways for providers to meet their requirements.

1

Strategic and operational plans for supporting students and enabling achievement to align to the student journey.

The provider's commitment to student development and achievement is explicitly expressed and integrated into strategies that inform operational approaches and ensure collective understanding for students and staff.

2

Clear, accessible and inclusive policies and procedures to enable students and staff to identify when support mechanisms may be required for academic and personal progression.

Policies are consistent, accessible, easy to understand, student-centred and up to date. Each policy is clearly linked to appropriate procedures to facilitate seamless identification of, and access to, any academic or other student support needs. The impact of current and proposed policies and procedures on students with protected characteristics is consistently assessed to identify and mitigate barriers to student development and achievement. Effective student support will recognise the diverse needs of the student body and mitigate the potential adverse effects associated with challenging aspects of the student experience such as complaints, retention or progression.

3

Training and resources are allocated to student support services to enable effective delivery, ensure comprehensive evaluation and subsequent development.

Support services encompass all areas of the student experience outside the formal curriculum. These areas include, but are not limited to, academic, financial, housing, welfare, employability and personal development. The effective management, delivery and success of these services is crucial to the student experience and can directly impact on progression and achievement rates. A strategic approach to resourcing that incorporates full evaluation of these services and considers feedback from students and staff can ensure successful delivery of student support services.

4

Clear, consistent and accessible communication about opportunities and support available to students from pre-entry through to completion and beyond.

Clear, consistent and accessible communications, from pre-entry through to graduation and beyond, will ensure students are fully informed of the opportunities and support available to them. This communication should be concise, timely and structured throughout the period of study and designed to facilitate student retention, progression and achievement. Effective communication with students will recognise different modes of study, individual learning styles and preferences.

5

Equality of opportunity for all students to develop academic and professional skills.

Ensuring equality of opportunity requires collaboration across academic, professional and specialist services. A broad and ongoing range of academic and pastoral support will be available, regardless of location or mode of study. Providers will need to consider both the needs of the individual student and the wider student body, including anticipating their varied requirements (such as protected characteristics).

6

Provide an accessible, inclusive and engaging community that incorporates staff and students to facilitate a supportive environment.

Providing students with a sense of belonging and supportive community aids retention and creates an open environment, where students can confidently seek help. Without this, students may not feel comfortable to engage with support services. An effective community can also enable students to assist each other, not only to provide support, but further develop and embed their own graduate attributes and outcomes.

7

Enable students to take responsibility for their own learning and become resilient individuals, equipped for a rewarding career.

Students are supported while participating in experiences relating to professional development, without barriers resulting from location of study, protected characteristics, financial or time constraints (for example, those who are at work or carers). Inclusive course design contains embedded and contextualised learning outcomes relating to academic and professional skills development. However, some groups of students are likely to require additional targeted or specialist support interventions.

8

Clearly communicate course outcomes and graduate attributes to all current and prospective students, staff and associated organisations.

Course outcomes are tailored to disciplines through the process of development (see also [Course Design and Development](#) and [Learning and Teaching](#) Themes). Staff and students across a provider need to understand how these outcomes are identified, assessed and reviewed to enable them to achieve their desired and required outcomes. Graduate attributes should be clear and specific, and communicated to students, staff and the public. The communication of attributes should enable students to understand how they can achieve and articulate them in a wider context. The attainment of specified attributes should not be dependent on the location, mode or level of study, or the presence or absence of any specific student characteristic.

9

Actively seek the feedback and engagement of students and staff to ensure continuous improvement of the learning environment.

Feedback from students and staff informs the continuous improvement of the effectiveness of arrangements to promote student achievement. Collective and individual student feedback may be gathered in a variety of ways, depending on the context of the individual provider (see also [Student Engagement](#) Theme). Providers are encouraged to use a range of informal and formal methods. Academic and support staff play a key role in enabling student achievement and providers are encouraged to involve them in the continuous review of support arrangements to enhance the learning environment.

Practical advice

This section provides practical, contextualised advice to providers on enabling student achievement. Where relevant, we have indicated which guiding principles the advice will help you achieve. Please bear in mind that this guidance is illustrative and intended to inform the approaches you consider and ultimately implement.

Develop targeted communication approaches

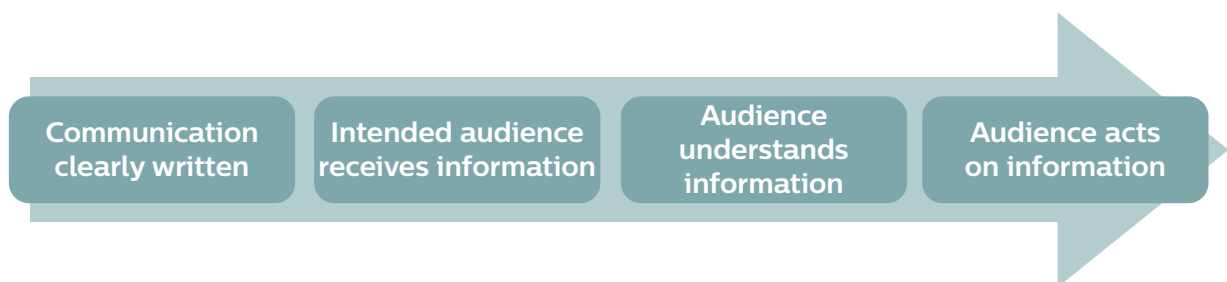
(Guiding principle 4, referencing 8, 9)

As students enter higher education from a wide range of backgrounds, providers are encouraged to focus on maximising the effectiveness of the ways in which they communicate key messages. They should develop communications with the recipient in mind, to ensure that the intended audience understands policies, key messages, opportunities, requirements and support.

Given the diversity of providers and student profiles there will be a differentiated approach towards communication. An inclusive learning environment anticipates the varied requirements of students; for example, this may be related to a declared disability, specific cultural background, mode of study or age.

Providers are encouraged to ensure that students have a clear understanding of terminology in relation to learning outcomes and the expectations for achieving them and how each individual student's progress will be managed as indicated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Communication with students.



Reflective questions

- Is your messaging timely, clear, concise and accessible?
- How does your messaging reflect the institutional context?
- Are you using an active voice and personalisation? For example, 'The Library provides information resources and services' not 'Information resources and services are provided by the Library'.
- How do you ensure that your communication is not too text and jargon heavy?
- How does your communication take account of the diversity of the student body?
- How do you evaluate the success of communication campaigns?

Engage students with managing their own progress

(Guiding principles 7, referencing 5, 6)

Providers should aim to ensure all students become actively involved in recording and discussing their academic progress with staff, using the most effective medium to engage with each individual.

The most successful approaches ensure that all students understand the formal processes and the role these processes have in supporting the achievement of successful outcomes; this may require more detailed explanation earlier in the student life cycle. Students who are fully informed and understand the opportunities to promote progression are more likely engage with the services and resources available to them.

Students actively record and review their development towards objectives and are proactive in setting their own targets to promote a real sense of ownership.

Reflective questions

- When do you inform students and check their understanding about the role of formal processes for recording academic progression?
- How do you reinforce these messages at guiding stages and in ways that encourage participation?
- How do you evaluate how students engage with support for academic progression?
- How do you evaluate the impact of support mechanisms at each stage of the student life cycle?
- How do you use evaluation to inform practice?

Reinforce transition into higher education and progression through the student life cycle (Guiding principles 2, referencing 6, 7, 8)

A positive transition into higher education and into different levels of study is essential to ensure equality of opportunity and a sense of belonging among students. It builds a strong foundation for resilience, independence and prospects. The greatest benefit is seen when transition support is embedded throughout provision, is relevant to students and features the concerted input of students along with academic, professional and specialist staff.

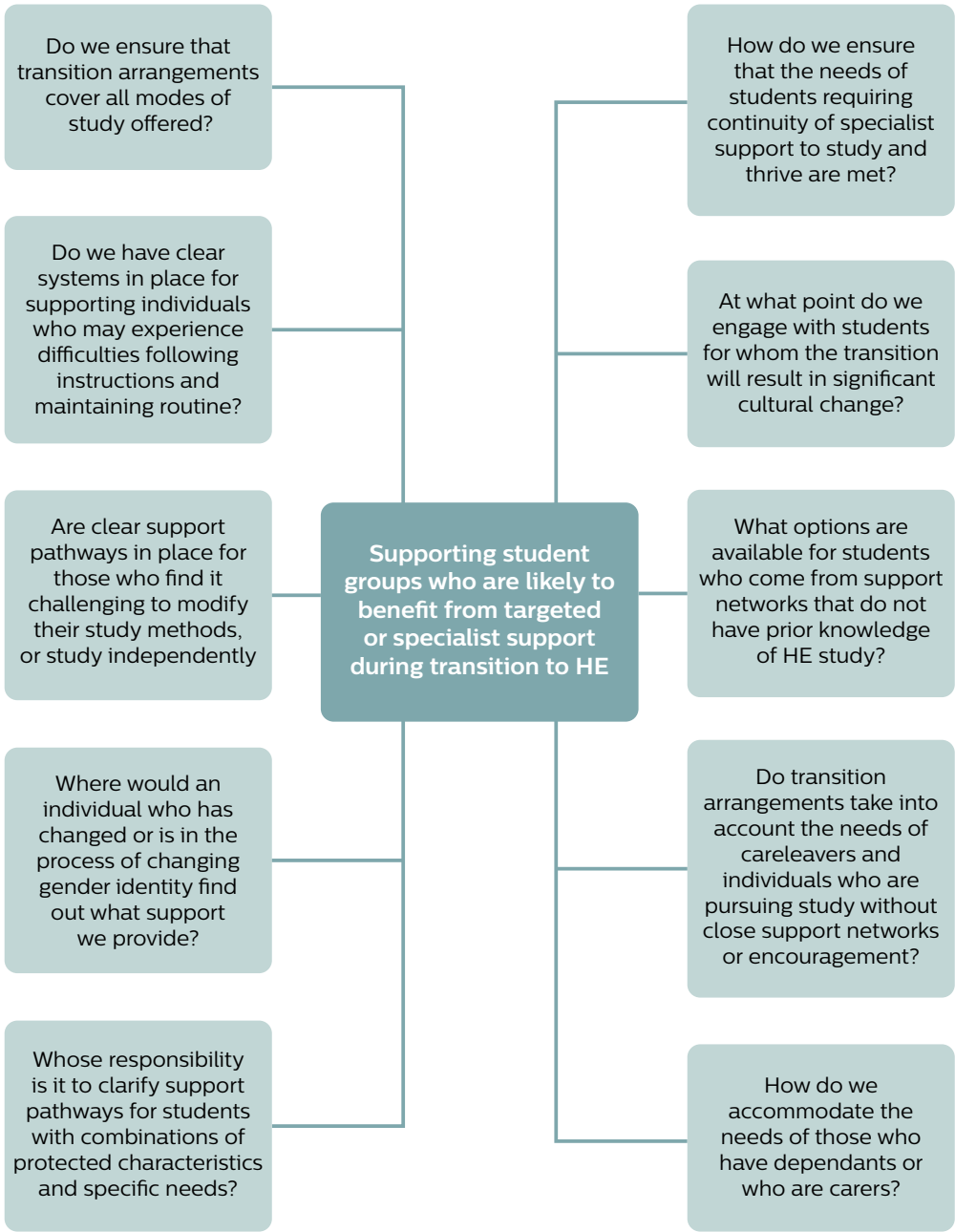
The diversity of the student body and the higher education landscape mean students will experience higher education in varying ways. Providers should ensure that design of course information, online communication, advice platforms and other reference points are delivered in a coherent way that reflects the diversity of the student population. It will clearly articulate the learning outcomes and expectations of successful achievement at each level of study (see also [Course Design and Development](#) Theme).

Reflective questions

- How do you communicate induction, course details and other information to students, using a variety of accessible formats?
- How do you foster a culture of belonging, independence and confidence in your support, and how do you know your strategies are effective?
- How do you involve staff and students in bringing together information about courses and induction? (See also [Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access](#) Theme)
- What activities do you undertake for prospective students, from a range of backgrounds, to prepare them to engage with their course? (See also [Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access](#) Theme)
- What activities do you undertake for those transitioning between levels?

Certain groups of students are likely to require more targeted or specialist support interventions to ensure equality of opportunity and successful achievement as shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Interventions to ensure equality of opportunity.



Feedback is gathered and acted upon through deliberative structures
(Guiding principle 1, referencing 9)

Gathering and acting on feedback is an essential element of student experience and achievement. Providers should effectively channel this feedback through the appropriate committees, boards, student groups and other relevant elements of the provider’s deliberative structure (see also [Student Engagement](#) Theme).

Providers should actively engage with both internal mechanisms, such as module or course reviews, and external mechanisms, such the National Student Survey (NSS), to inform their policy, strategy and practice around enhancing the student experience and enabling student achievement. A list of internal and external sources of information that can be used to enable student achievement is provided in the Monitoring and Evaluation section (page 10).

At all stages of the process, higher education providers should seek to work transparently and collaboratively with staff, students and their representatives, and in adherence to all ethical standards set by the provider and any relevant professional bodies, regulators or other parties.

Everyone involved in the learning process should be able to provide feedback on any aspect of the learning journey. How to provide feedback should be clear and accessible, along with an understanding of how feedback will be used, empowering students and others to confidently engage in shaping future practice (see also [Learning and Teaching](#) Theme).

Reflective questions

- How do you ensure that the mechanisms for providing feedback are timely, widely known and understood?
- How do you close the feedback loop to all who have offered feedback?
- How do you use feedback in the monitoring and evaluation of student support?
- What methods do you use for collecting feedback?
- How is your feedback recorded and shared?
- How do you use feedback to inform policy, strategy and practice?

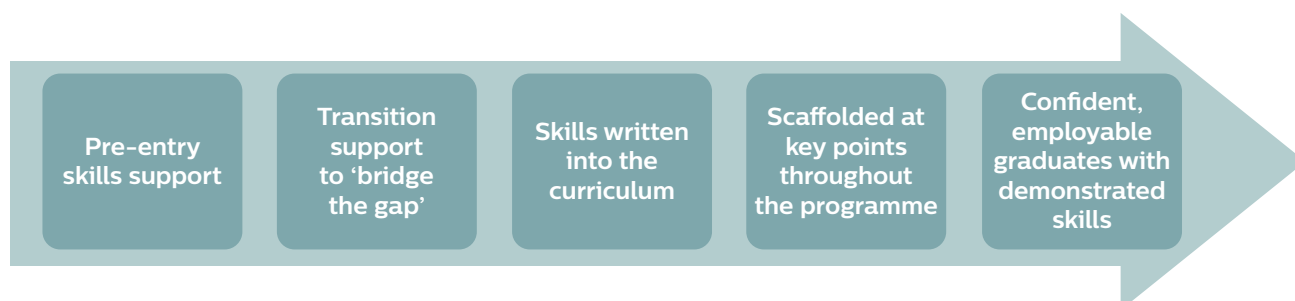
Academic and professional skills development (Guiding principle 5, referencing 7)

Academic skills delivery supports students to contribute to their field of study and successfully communicate their knowledge and understanding. Some skills will be discipline specific, such as writing laboratory reports or reflecting on clinical practice, whereas others have global relevance such as critical thinking, problem solving or teamwork. Such skills not only support academic progression, but also provide relevant attributes for employment.

Providers play a pivotal role in the professional development of their students, and enhancing these skills equips them to progress into employment, self-employment or further study. Opportunities to develop professional skills and experience throughout the student life cycle ensures that 'employability' is understood as a process of learning with attributes developed in stages and explicitly linked to academic and industry attributes.

The collaboration of academic staff and professional services staff ensures the effective integration of student academic and professional development as illustrated in Figure 3:

Figure 3: Collaboration between academic and professional staff to ensure integration of development.



Reflective questions

- Do you have an institutional framework for the delivery of student academic and professional development embedded into course design?
- How do you support the collaboration of academic and professional services staff to develop and deliver accessible academic and professional skills to students?
- What provision of professional experience do you offer, through a variety of methods such as 'live briefs', talks, placements, simulations, or voluntary work?
- What peer support mechanisms do you have in place to encourage your students to develop their independent study habits?
- How do you support students at each transition point to recognise, develop and apply skills they can use during and after their studies?

Identify the staff roles which are integral to enabling student progression and achievement (**Guiding principle 3**)

There are a range of staff roles that are integral to enabling student progression and achievement. These include: academic staff; those in support functions such as student services, finance and welfare, learning resources, information technology, careers services and registry; external professional support services and employers.

Providers should define, coordinate, monitor and evaluate staff roles and responsibilities to ensure students have access to the support and opportunities required to achieve their personal and academic goals. It is important that all staff are appropriately qualified, trained and supported.

All staff should be encouraged and supported to recognise and understand their specific role and responsibilities in enabling student achievement, and provided with transparent, effective and appropriate mechanisms for liaising with, and referring, students to the full range of expert and professional sources of information, advice and guidance available. They should work actively with others to enable student achievement, including other education providers, employers offering work-based learning or placement opportunities, and third-party organisations offering specialist support and advice to students or the wider sector.

Reflective questions

- How do staff understand their specific role in enabling student achievement?
- How do you ensure that staff understand how to access the full range of expert and professional resources?
- What mechanisms do you have in place to ensure students know where they can go for support and the types of support available?
- Who do you work with externally to provide student support?
- How do you ensure the support provided is timely, targeted and effective?

Monitoring and evaluation of services that enable student achievement (Guiding principle 9, referencing 3)

The information here refers to specific advice for this Theme. For generic advice around monitoring and evaluation for quality purposes, see the [Monitoring and Evaluation](#) Theme.

Focus areas for improvement through monitoring and evaluation

Guiding areas that those involved in enabling student achievement can measure impact through effective monitoring and evaluation include (please note that this list is not exhaustive):

- learning gain from entry to exit
- destination statistics for graduates
- courses that have reduced barriers or promoted access
- new or modified course design objectives, externally set objectives (for example, sector-wide targets for widening access)
- benchmarking against previous results (particularly useful for surveys and ‘headline’ reporting)
- measure the impact of initiatives on individual questions in surveys.

Examples of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for enabling student achievement

UK-wide or Government reporting	National Student Survey
	Jisc reporting
	Teaching Excellence Framework (optional in some jurisdictions)
	Graduate Outcomes Survey
	Access Agreements
UK nation specific requirements	Annual Provider Review (NI)
	Scottish Quality Enhancement Arrangements
	Quality Enhancement Review (Wales)
	Outcome Agreement (Scotland)
	Thematic Report (Scotland)
	Gateway Quality Review (Wales)
	Annual Assurance Reports (Wales)
	Fee and Access Plan monitoring reports (Wales)
	Annual report on Welsh Language Standards (Wales)
External reporting	Reports for accrediting bodies or PSRB
	Graduate recruiters
External reporting (opt in)	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)
	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)
Internal reporting	Institution-led review (Scotland)
	Module evaluations
	Course evaluations
	Learning and teaching surveys
	Alumni
	Employer surveys
	Post-induction surveys
	Pre-exit surveys
	Early-leavers surveys/interviews
	Staff surveys
	Student focus groups
	Students' Association/Union campaigns/reports/activity
	Benchmarking - retention/achievement/success
	Concerns, complaints and appeals

Reflective questions

- What range of mechanisms do you use to obtain feedback from staff, students and others?
- How do you develop a shared understanding of the types and timing of feedback, its uses and evaluation?
- What monitoring activities do you undertake?
- How does monitoring feed into evaluation at each level, from individual level through to provider level?

Writing group

Julia Billaney

Higher Education Registrar

Hull College

Ruth Burchell

Standards and Frameworks Coordinator

QAA

Maxina Butler-Holmes

Executive Director for Higher Education

DN Colleges Group

Margaret Danquah

Careers Advisor

University of West London

Sandy George

Head of Centre for Academic Success

Swansea University

William Hasty

Quality Enhancement Specialist

QAA Scotland

Lewis Lay

Student Voice Manager

Aston University

Daniel Parrott

Assessment Centre Manager, Student Service

Swansea University

Deborah Peat

Head of Strategy and Quality Development

Open University

Elizabeth Shackels

Quality & Performance Manager

South West College

Mark Yates

Careers Advisor

Writtle University College

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