



The UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Advice and Guidance



Sector-Agreed Principle 10 -
Supporting students to achieve
their potential

September 2026



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About this Guidance

Context

This Advice and Guidance supports the [UK Quality Code](#) for Higher Education (Quality Code) and is designed to unpack Sector-Agreed Principle 10 - Supporting students to achieve their potential and the Key Practices that sit under it. It has been produced by QAA in partnership with a writing group of sector experts and peer-reviewed by colleagues across UK higher education. This is in accordance with the ethos that the Quality Code remains a sector-agreed reference point, built on a shared understanding of what providers can expect of themselves and each other in the assurance and enhancement of quality and the maintenance of standards across post-secondary education throughout the UK. QAA would like to thank the writing group and peer readers for their invaluable contribution in developing this guidance. Details of the writing and reading groups can be found on [page 68](#) of this guidance.

An important contextual note relates to the diversity of higher education providers in the UK. Providers can be large universities, operating with significant infrastructure, or small specialist providers, operating on a significantly smaller scale, or any number of other different operating models. The Advice and Guidance is designed to be useful for all providers (and representatives from a range of providers formed the writing and peer review groups), but we recognise that, on occasion, the nomenclature used could suggest a larger provider's context. It is important that each reader interprets the Advice and Guidance in the context of their own operating environment and that all readers recognise that quality and homogeneity are not synonymous.

Scope

This Advice and Guidance encourages providers to reflect on their practice and processes in relation to the Sector-Agreed Principle. Following the Advice and Guidance is not mandatory, but illustrative of approaches that can help providers meet the relevant Principle. National regulators and QAA do not view the information in the Advice and Guidance as compliance indicators. This guidance does not interpret statutory requirements.

The language we use

Where the word 'should' (or any other similarly directive language) appears in the Advice and Guidance this represents a shared understanding within the UK higher education community. On some occasions an institution can align with the Sector-Agreed Principle in a range of different ways, and in such cases an institution may have a different approach to that set out here. Ultimately, to be aligned with the Quality Code, an institution must be able to demonstrate how it meets the Sector-Agreed Principles in practice. No provider or individual should feel that the Advice and Guidance is prescriptive or impinges their autonomy or freedoms.

Structure

In response to sector demand, the Advice and Guidance aligns directly with the overarching Sector-Agreed Principles to provide clear navigation between the different elements. The guidance begins by unpacking the Principle in an operational context. It is then divided into subsections focusing on each Key Practice outlining practical considerations and approaches for providers to benchmark their own way of working. This features practical tips and experience shared by providers on operational practice. Finally, in each subsection there are tools to enable reflection on the guidance. These tools offer the opportunity to explore what 'good' might look like through reflective questions and practical scenarios that enable interrogation of current practice with a view to enhancing quality.

Commonly used terms

The following terms are used throughout this advice. Other terms which benefit from a precise definition are listed at the end of this document.

- **Students:** refers to all individuals studying towards a higher-level award regardless of demographic, mode of delivery, level of study, subject area, or geographic location.
- **Provider:** describes all types of organisations that provide higher level learning, including universities, colleges, institutes of learning, and employers. We also use 'institution' in some instances where 'provider' might not suit the context.
- **Student representative body:** a formal body or mechanism that represents and promotes the interests of students. This may be known as a students' union, a students' association, or guild, or by another bespoke name where these specific organisations do not exist.



Sector-Agreed Principle 10 and its Key Practices

Providers facilitate a framework of support for students that enables them to have a high-quality learning experience and achieve their potential as they progress in their studies. The support structure scaffolds the academic, personal and professional learning journey, enabling students to recognise and articulate their progress and achievements.

Key Practices

- a. Accessible, relevant, accurate and timely information is offered to students and the staff supporting them throughout the learning journey about the provider, programme of study, wider opportunities for development and availability of support services.
- b. All students are supported at key transition points throughout their journey, with their specific needs and requirements met and their pathways into learning recognised.
- c. Students and staff are aware of the ongoing academic, professional and pastoral services and activities available, and students are encouraged to access these opportunities and support throughout their learning journey.
- d. Staff are appropriately qualified, trained and supported to deliver high-quality learning and support for all students, particularly those with specific needs and requirements.
- e. Students and staff recognise that activities offered outside the formal curriculum are beneficial for promoting students' sense of belonging, as well as providing opportunities to broaden their skills and achievements, complementing their formal studies



Principle 10 - Supporting students to achieve their potential

Providers facilitate a framework of support for students that enables them to have a high-quality learning experience and achieve their potential as they progress in their studies. The support structure scaffolds the academic, personal and professional learning journey, enabling students to recognise and articulate their progress and achievements.

This Principle emphasises the importance of using a framework of support that underpins a high-quality learning and wider student experience. This framework should be clearly communicated, well understood by both students and staff, and applied consistently and equitably across all areas of provision, regardless of where or how they are delivered.

The framework defines the institution's responsibility for supporting student success in a timely manner and clarifies accountability and ownership for its key components. Providers set out how support is delivered across academic provision, professional services and extracurricular activities.

Aligning the vision for student support to key institutional strategies will help ensure that their framework for supporting students is coherent and aligns to strategic goals.

The following common strategic documents may prove useful in setting this vision:

- institutional curriculum framework
- strategic approach to managing quality and standards (see [Principle 1 - Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards, Key Practice b](#)) and alignment to measurable outcomes such as continuation, completion, and progression, which are central to regulatory expectations
- access and participation plans
- external charter action plans (such as [Race Equality Charter](#), [Athena SWAN](#), or [Mental Health Charter](#))
- strategic approach to engaging students as partners as outlined in [Principle 2 - Engaging students as partners, Key Practice a](#)
- strategic approach to utilising data and analytics to identify need, target interventions, and evaluating impact (see [Principle 4 - Using data to inform and evaluate quality](#)).

Mapping the learning journey

A fundamental step in developing a framework of support, is taking time to understand and map students' learning journeys. It is worth recognising that different types of programme and, indeed, types of student may require separate journeys to reflect the diversity of pathways that students take throughout their journey into, through and out of tertiary education. For example, the learning journey of an online student may vary considerably to that of a campus-based student and again to that of an apprentice.

Mapping and disseminating a student journey will:

- enable effective communication/information to be disseminated at the most appropriate times
- ensure appropriate support is offered throughout the learning journey
- encourage understanding by students and staff of the journey and the support available throughout
- enable an appropriate schedule for training staff and student representatives
- ensure support activities (both academic and outside the curriculum) are complementary rather than competing.

Collaboration between stakeholders ensures that any working definition of the learning journey is informed by diverse perspectives and experiences, and alignment to institutional priorities relating to the approach of managing quality and standards as set out in [Principle 1 - Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards](#).

These stakeholders typically include:

- students and student representatives
- academic staff
- academic support
- third space practitioners (those whose roles cross both academic and professional services)
- professional service practitioners
- students' union staff and sabbatical officers
- partner organisations.

Providers are encouraged to ensure that they have developed a clear working definition of a learning journey.

Indicatively journey/s would include consideration of:

- recruitment
- induction
- programme of study
- transition points
- support service availability
- extracurricular opportunities
- developmental opportunities
- employability beyond graduation.

Provider context

In developing a learning journey, providers should take account of their own context and operating environment. Learning journeys may need to be applied or adapted differently depending on factors such as organisational scale, subject focus, delivery model and partnership arrangements.

For example, providers may wish to consider the extent to which approaches are personalised or standardised; whether information needs to be tailored to particular disciplines or learner groups; how roles and responsibilities are articulated within partnerships between higher and further education; and how learning journeys operate across different languages, time zones and regulatory contexts in transnational education. Where learning journeys are delivered through partnerships, providers should also consider how consistency of messaging is maintained across organisations.

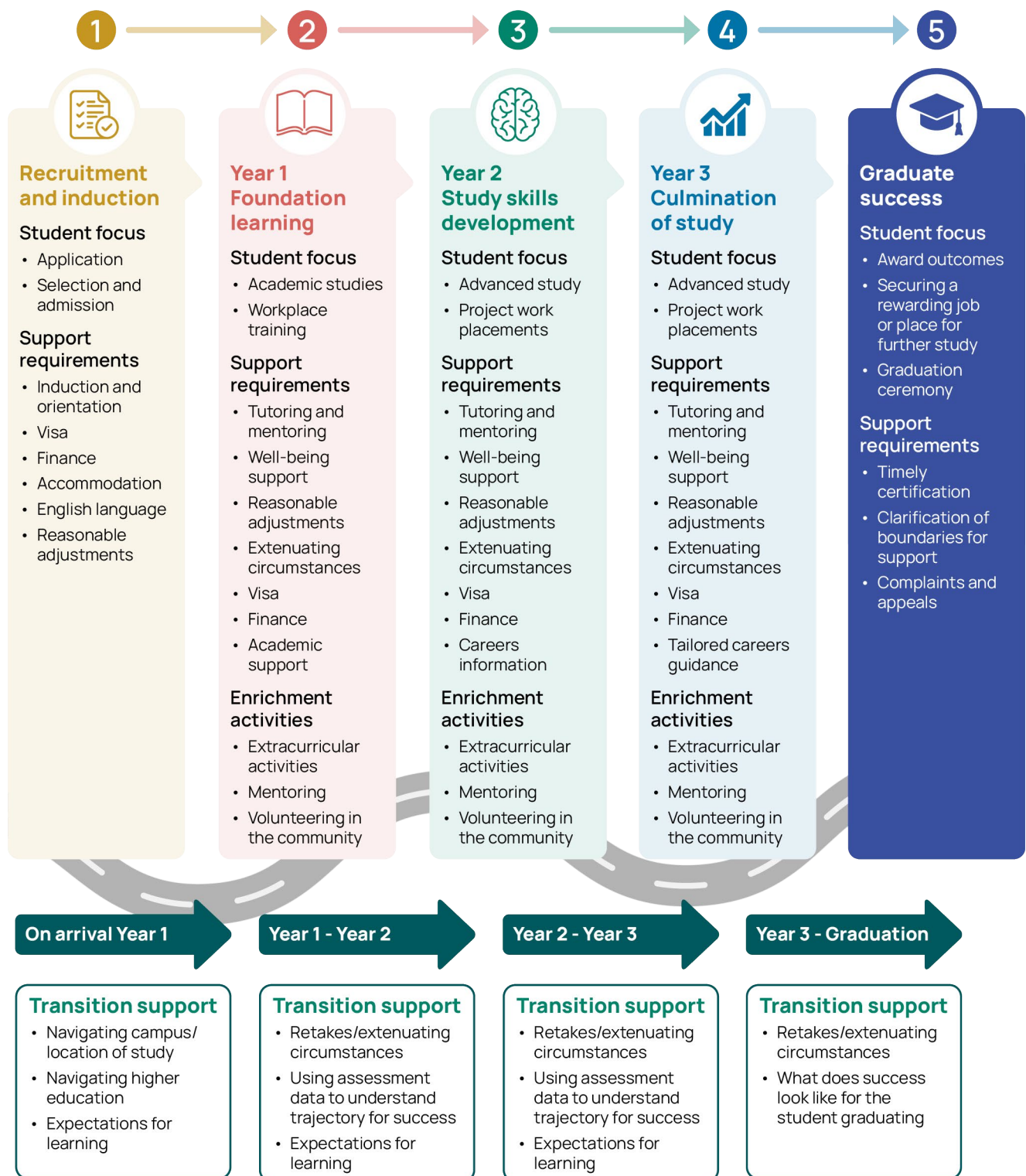
Providers might therefore consider the applicability of any learning journey across partnership arrangements, whether within the UK or in transnational education settings, and make adaptations where appropriate.

Refining the learning journey

Figure 1 illustrates a holistic view of a typical undergraduate journey; however, it may also be structured by theme such as employability, skill development, and well-being according to targeted priority areas for support.



Figure 1: Example of a typical undergraduate learning journey map (dependent upon provider's context and learner profile)

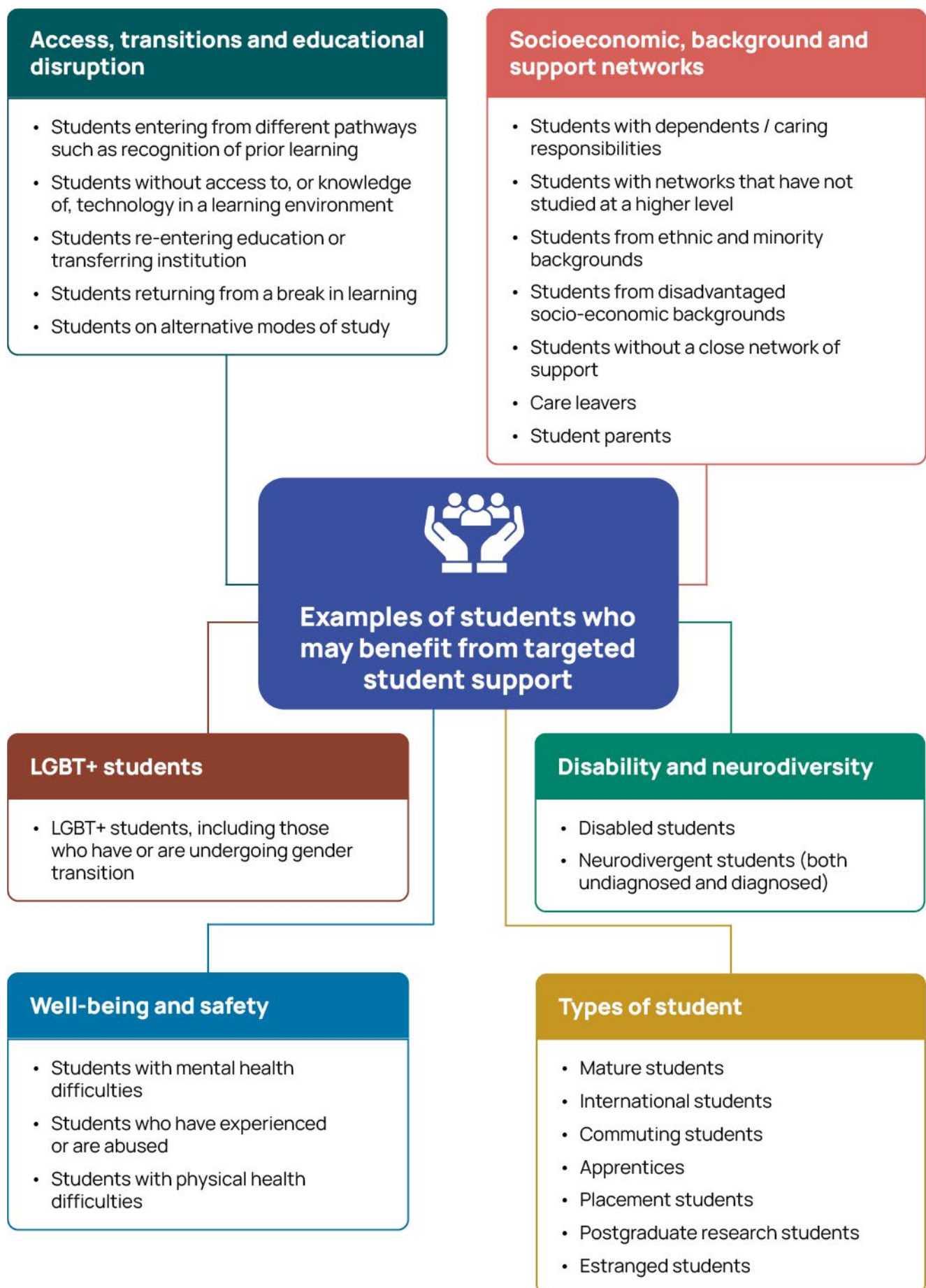


To ensure there is support where it is most needed, providers may wish to draw on monitoring and evaluation data, such as student outcomes, teaching, learning and assessment feedback, data from complaints and that garnered from extenuating circumstances; alongside staff feedback to inform how the learning journey is mapped and refined. This demonstrates to students and staff how this data can be used to inform the provision of support across their studies.

It is helpful to also consider how any framework of support would impact students in specific groups (as shown in Figure 2) or those who have intersectional needs, along with the targeted support you may be able to provide. However, it is also important to aim for universal approaches in support that anticipates varied student needs, rather than exclusively responding or making adjustments at an individual level.



Figure 2: Examples of students who may benefit from targeted student support



Reflective questions

1. Is our vision for student support well understood by staff and students?
2. Which key strategies do we want our vision for student support to align to?
3. How are we assured that our vision and learning journeys for student support caters to the diversity of students and provision that we offer?
4. How do the learning journeys compare between our home students and our students studying at partner providers?
5. How are learning journey/s reviewed and updated in consultation with key stakeholders?
6. How do course enhancement metrics inform the development of the learning journey (NSS / PTES / PRES / graduate outcomes / national data sets)?
7. How do we review the learning journeys of our students to ensure they reflect our current student body?
8. How are our learning journey clearly defined, mapped out and presented?
9. How are key terms associated with the learning journey understood by all stakeholders (such as students, staff) across our institution?



Key Practice a -
Accessible, relevant,
accurate and timely
information offered to
students and the staff
supporting them

Key Practice a

Accessible, relevant, accurate and timely information offered to students and the staff supporting them

Accessible, relevant, accurate and timely information is offered to students and the staff supporting them throughout the learning journey about the provider, programme of study, wider opportunities for development and availability of support services.

The focus of this Key Practice is on the provision of information to students and the availability of support as they progress through their studies. It reminds providers to consider how relevant and timely information is accurately communicated, how consistency is ensured and how information is made accessible to different audiences.

Providers are advised to establish how and when information about support services is communicated to students through mapping it to the student learning journey/s as outlined in the opening section of this Advice and Guidance.

While effective communication is essential, providers should also consider how they assure themselves that students are engaging with, understanding and acting upon information provided. This may include monitoring engagement, seeking feedback on communications, and identifying where additional intervention or personalised support may be required.



Considerations for communicating information about student support

Providers need to consider the volume, sequencing and repetition of information does not result in information overload. Identifying what is sent to students as core information, what is sent as additional information along with that sent to specific groups of students will help with mitigating overload for students and staff. Further consideration will focus on the timing, audience and what comprises relevant information, along with the best methods of communication for the message/s delivered.

It is recommended that providers think carefully about disseminating information about student support in terms of:

Defined responsibilities for communicating the information

- Is there an agreed provider approach to communicating with students?
- Does content get checked and approved?
- Who owns the information (for example, is it the student representative body or institution, or individual department)?
- Is specific sign-off required? (for example, if the communication is of a sensitive nature or if communicating with a particular demographic, this may need an additional level of sign-off to that above)
- Is there an agreed schedule for communicating to students?

How the information is to be communicated

- What is the most effective method of communication?
- Will the student representative body or student societies be involved in communicating the information?
- Will staff receive information at the same time as students?
- What do we want students and staff to do with the information (for example, is it a call to action or simply for information)?

How the information is likely to be received

- Is the message good news or bad news? What sort of reaction might the information provoke? Have key stakeholders been informed?
- Could the communication result in an increase in enquiries? Have relevant stakeholders been informed?
- Is the information relevant to all those receiving it (for example, is it only relevant to students on campus / able to get to campus)?

Communicating at different points of the learner journey

Communication will need to occur throughout the learning journey, including at transition points. Figure 3 (below) highlights key communication points during the learning journey. Figure 5 outlines a more detailed example of support that is needed at key transition points.

Figure 3: Key communication points for consideration during the learning journey

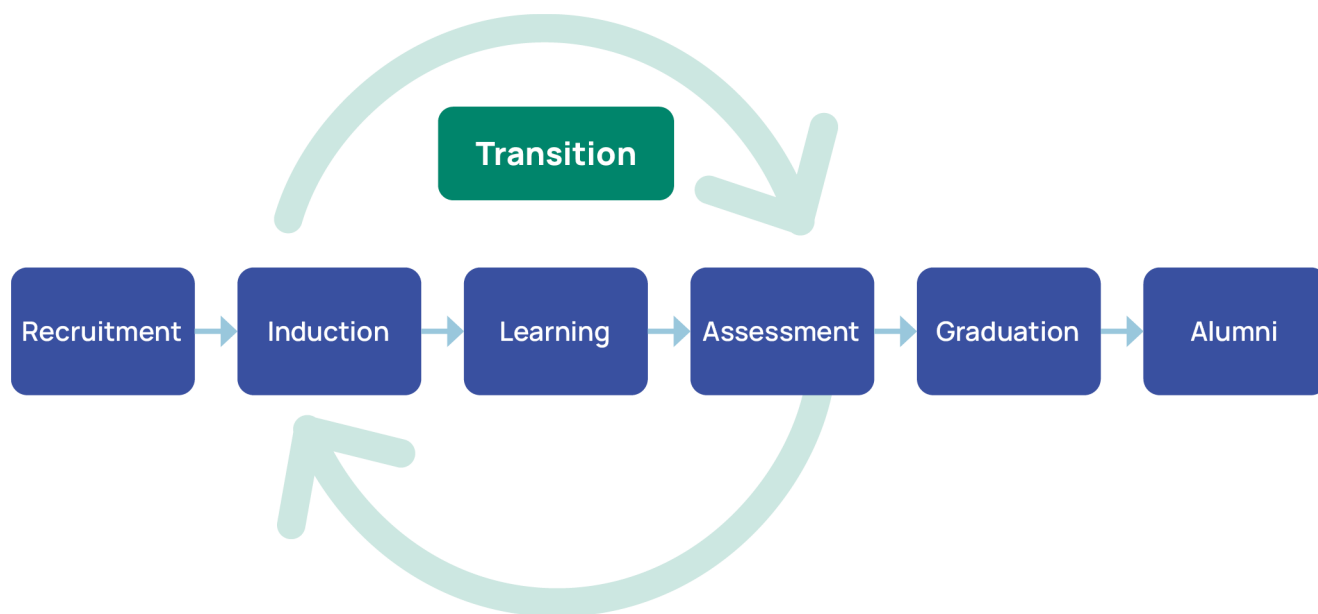


Table 1: Examples of information to be disseminated and methods of communication

Stage of the learning journey	Examples of information to disseminate	Example methods of communication
Recruitment	• Entry requirements, fees, accommodation, available support, course options • Visa information • English language requirements (where applicable)	• Course web pages • Prospectus materials • Online events • Social media • Visit days • Information supplied by agents • National websites to aid research, such as What Uni
Induction	• Guidance on joining the institution • Accessing systems • Contractual information - what can I expect from my provider and what is expected of me • Available support options - academic, financial, visa and well-being • Extracurricular opportunities • Student voice/representation mechanisms	• Welcome guides • Timetables • Orientation sessions • Introductory communications • WhatsApp groups (used for societies and extracurricular activities) • Student representative body
Teaching and learning	• Information on teaching, learning, assessment • Ongoing academic development • Reasonable adjustment support • Concerns, complaints and appeals • Academic and well-being support options • Financial • Visa monitoring	• Programme and module handbooks • Digital platforms / VLE • Student communications

Stage of the learning journey	Examples of information to disseminate	Example methods of communication
Assessment	• Assessment criteria • Permitted/assistive/non-permitted use of AI • Deadlines and submission instructions • How the assessment supports development • Reasonable adjustment and extenuating circumstances • Concerns, complaints and appeals • Academic and well-being support options • Visa monitoring information	• Assessment brief • Formative feedback • Summative feedback • Progression guidance • VLE • Student representative body
Transition	• Support for progression advice • Resit information • Placements, work-based learning • Preparation for careers/ journey beyond graduation • Academic and well-being support options • Financial • Visa • Feedback mechanisms • Concerns, complaints and appeals	• Careers communications • Email • Placement briefings • Personal tutor meetings
Graduation	• Information about awards • Information about held awards • Completion, celebration • Transcripts and certificates	• Graduation materials (including financial support) • Careers and postgraduate study signposting

Stage of the learning journey	Examples of information to disseminate	Example methods of communication
Alumni	• Information about postgraduate opportunities • Future engagement • Staying in touch and data sharing • NSS / Student Surveys reminders	• Email • Post • WhatsApp / social media

Communicating to varying audiences

When communicating with students, it is worth considering who the audience is and how to tailor information for different recipients.

Consideration will be given to:

- varying student demographics
- course type
- level of programme
- mode of study
- method of delivery
- location of the students (for example, are they on campus, on placement at a partner provider).

Providers may wish to continue to explore innovations in communication, for example digital tools, student-led approaches and interactive mapping, to ensure that information remains accessible, engaging and responsive to evolving needs.

Ensuring communication is accessible

Accessible information supports students' ability to understand, act on and engage with key messages and support at appropriate points throughout their studies and highlights opportunities for further development.

To ensure information is accessible across the diversity of the student population and staff, it is important to consider the use of plain English, alternative formats, alt text and assistive technologies. Providers can deploy multiple channels, for example, virtual learning environments, student portals, email, apps, printed materials, and in-person guidance; but accessibility should be prioritised, and providers need to avoid duplication or overload by streamlining and sequencing messages carefully. To assist with this, providers should also consider the use of visual tools such as journey maps, dashboards, or interactive infographics to ensure information reaches its intended audience/s in an accessible format.

Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of communications

Regular monitoring and evaluation of communications are essential for the continuous improvement and enhancement of student support services. They also help ensure that information provided to students remains accurate, up to date and reflective of current student experiences and needs.

Providers are reminded to review the timeliness of responses to initial and ongoing requests for support, recognising the potential impact on students when enquiries are not answered promptly. They are also encouraged to evaluate the accessibility and effectiveness of the routes through which students access support, seek advice, raise concerns and provide feedback. Well-designed and responsive processes help build trust, enable emerging issues to be identified and addressed early, and support a culture of partnership between students and providers.

The method for monitoring and evaluation might be embedded through internal quality assurance activity (see [Principles 4 - Using data to inform and evaluate quality](#) and [Principle 5 - Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision](#)) or regulatory reporting and will likely draw on sources such as student programme and support service feedback, engagement metrics, and continuation and completion data.

Responsibility for oversight of monitoring and evaluation information pertaining to student support might typically sit with a centralised student experience or strategic planning team.



Reflective questions

1. How do we maintain consistency and accuracy of information maintained and shared across departments, services, wider institutional frameworks, and delivery channels?
2. To what extent are our communications coordinated, consistent, relevant and timely?
3. How is the accessibility of our communication ensured, for example adapting messages to reflect the needs of diverse groups?
4. How do we work with our student representative body to ensure a consistent approach to informing students and staff (for awareness) about the support opportunities available to them?
5. How confident are we that our communications are relevant to those who receive them? How do we know?
6. What are the risks associated with information overload?
7. Are we confident that communications about student support services go to staff who need to be aware of them?
8. How is stakeholder feedback gathered and acted upon in relation to the accessibility, relevance, accuracy and timeliness of information?
9. How will future innovations in communication be optimised (such as digital tools, student-led approaches, interactive mapping)?
10. How are information practice and quality benchmarked against sector standards and peer institutions?

Scenario

Use of information to support apprenticeship students across the learning journey

Context

Student feedback and engagement data demonstrates that apprenticeship students are experiencing information saturation. It is reported that this is particularly significant around induction/re-orientation and assessment periods.

Feedback highlights duplication of messaging from the higher education provider and their employer that includes similar but not quite the same information. Apprentices report that there is unclear ownership of information, and difficulty in identifying priority communications.

The provider convenes a cross-functional working group to review academic and induction support communications to apprentices.

The group included representation from:

- employers
- faculties
- staff delivering teaching and learning
- student support services
- library services
- student representative body
- recruitment and admissions
- apprentice representatives.

Collectively, the group undertook a review exercise to identify what information apprentices received at different points of their learning journey, who had ownership of the communication, and through which channels it was relayed.

Following this, targeted focus groups were held with apprentices, employers and link tutors. Staff and professional services were also consulted to gain further insight.

Outcomes

In response to the review and consultation exercises, the provider agreed a set of guidelines for information provision in support of the learning journey. Clear information was given on the timing and volume of communications, and on the use of consistent language and signposting to support services.

Responsibilities for ongoing oversight of student information were assigned to an existing student experience group, with monitoring and evaluation embedded across annual review processes and informed by student feedback and engagement data along with a clear timeline for review.

Considerations

- How are responsibilities for the creation, approval and dissemination of information defined and coordinated between employer and provider? How is this recorded in the formal partnership agreement and then communicated to apprentices?
- How does the provider ensure that information is relevant, timely and proportionate at different points in the apprentice lifecycle?
- More widely, how is information provision adapted for students studying through partnership or transnational arrangements?
- How is the effectiveness of information and communications monitored and evaluated over time?



Key Practice b - Supporting students at key transition points

Key Practice b

Supporting students at key transition points

All students are supported at key transition points throughout their journey, with their specific needs and requirements met and their pathways into learning recognised.

Supporting students through key transition points is essential for fostering engagement, belonging and success. Effective transition guidance and support recognises that students enter and progress through study with diverse backgrounds, experiences and aspirations.

Throughout their journey, students face multiple transition points; this can be challenging but also offer opportunities for growth. These transitions encompass academic, personal and social changes that require resilience and new skills to evolve towards effective adjustment and ultimately success. The design of transition activities should seek to support those entering/re-entering into a provider, those progressing between levels of study, and those preparing for employment or further study.

Transition points may also represent periods of increased vulnerability. Providers should consider how safeguarding, well-being, financial hardship, accommodation concerns, disability support requirements and other emerging risks are identified and managed during periods of change or disruption.

Support for transitions

A central theme throughout this guidance is that transition support is most effective when embedded across programmes, courses, and student support structures. This requires institution-wide investment, strategic commitment and time to develop a transition pedagogy that addresses shared transition points and responds to the specific needs of individual students.

Developing an approach to supporting transition

A holistic approach

Transitioning into new learning environments and programmes requires administrative, pastoral and teaching teams to collaborate with and for the learner. A 'bottom-up' approach ensures that support is integrated into existing structures and that communication is consistent across the provider.

Continuity of support is essential as it maintains engagement and promotes confidence, preventing attrition or withdrawal, especially during the first year of study or post placement return. It also ensures that academic, well-being, and career support are connected rather than siloed and that progression pathways are clear.

Where institutional systems and processes are difficult to understand for staff, students and other stakeholders, they risk creating miscommunication and unrealistic expectations. Processes can also allow for the timely sharing of information so students are not required to repeatedly disclose sensitive issues, and so emerging challenges can be recognised early.

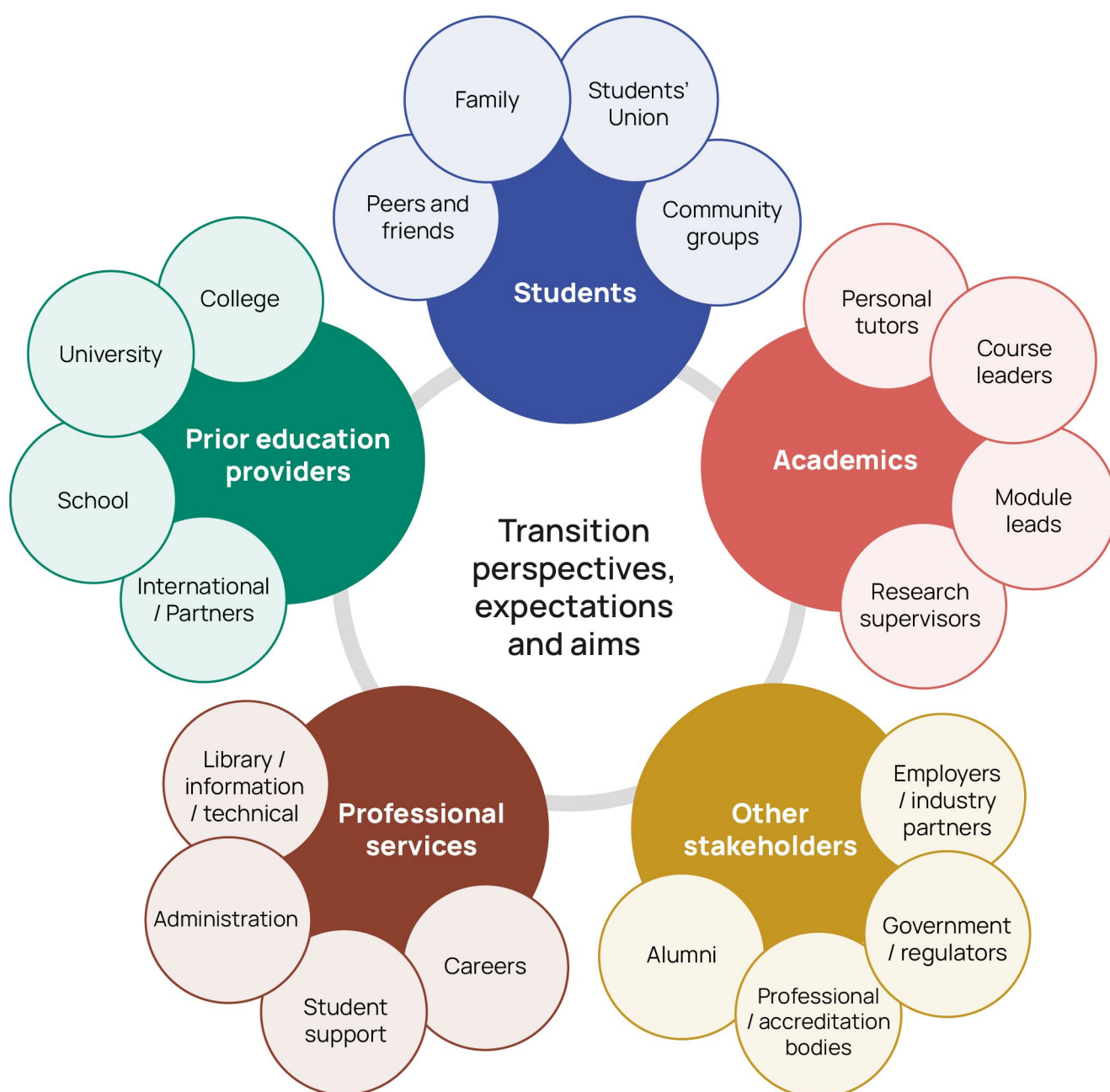
Effective transition support is often underpinned by proactive approaches that identify students who may be at increased risk of disengagement. Providers may utilise engagement data, attendance information, learning analytics, student self-referral mechanisms and professional judgement to facilitate timely interventions and coordinated support before challenges escalate.



Involving stakeholders

As can be seen in Figure 4 below, some students will require support from multiple services simultaneously. Providers should therefore consider how support is coordinated across academic teams, professional services and external partners, reducing duplication and ensuring students are not repeatedly required to disclose the same information multiple times. Planning with and for these stakeholders helps build coherent, joined-up support and reinforces that responsibility for transition is shared.

Figure 4: Examples of different stakeholders involved in transitions



An iterative framework

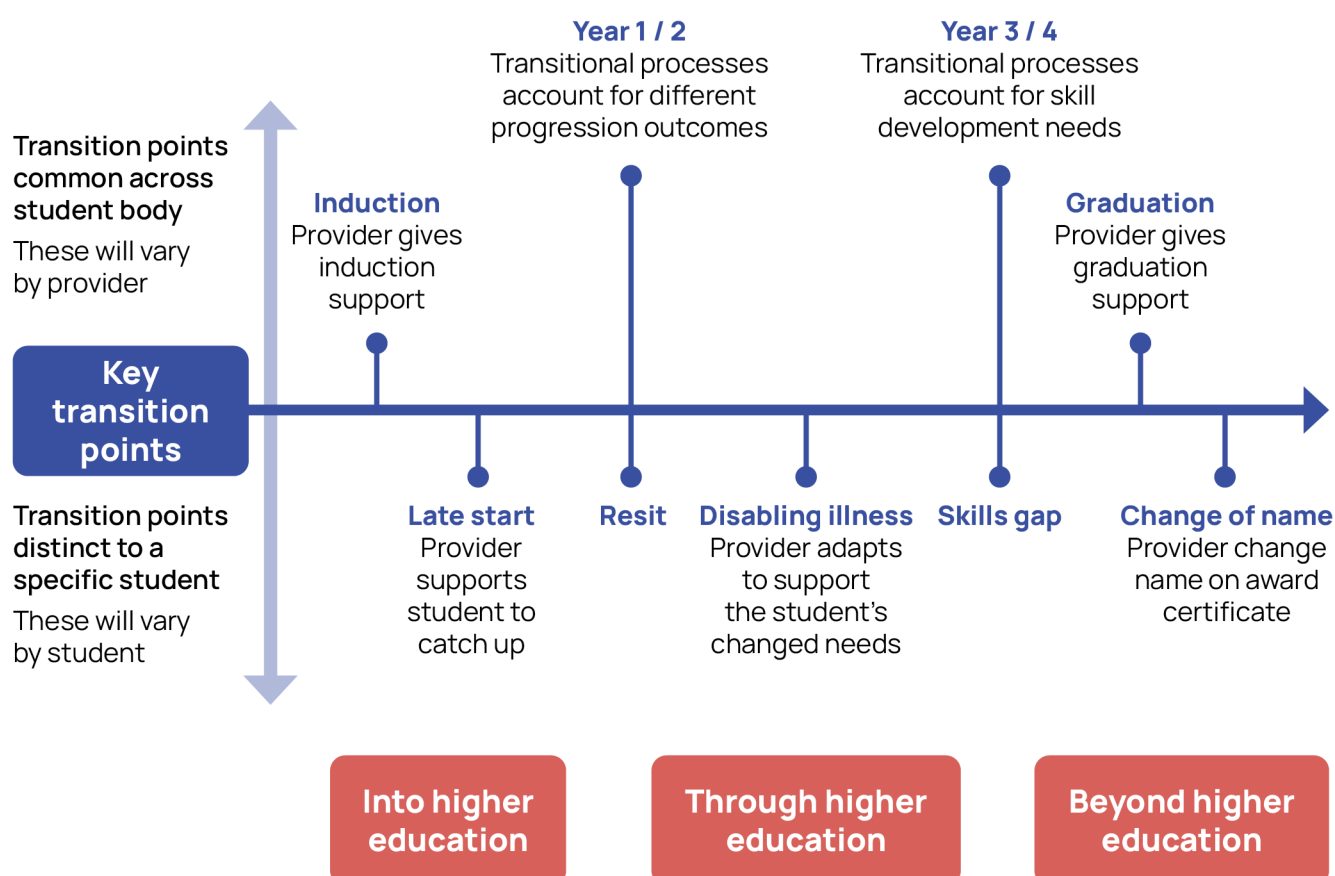
An approach to support for transitions is not static. Institutions regularly review, evaluate and adapt their structures, policies and practices to ensure they continue to meet the needs of contemporary student populations.

Recognising key transition points

Figure 5 illustrates a transition model that builds on the student journey described in the introductory section. It illustrates the fluid and multidimensional nature of transition, acknowledging that while transition is universal, each student's experience is unique. The model aims to widen the scope of our understanding, so that the varied experiences of transition within the student body can be recognised, anticipated and responded to. Noting some that are common across the student body and some distinct to a specific student, each requiring institutional support.

Figure 5: Transition model outlining key transition points.

Student journey



The model above demonstrates that key transition points can arise in different forms. Some are common transition points, such as induction or progression, experienced broadly across the student body. However, transitions are not only fixed milestones; just as key are the student-specific transition points, reflecting changes in a student's academic, personal and social needs.

Sometimes, students' needs align with common transition points; at other times they diverge. However, these are all key transition points that providers are advised to recognise, anticipate and respond to when developing a transition approach.

Institutions may also identify additional transition points relevant to their specific provision; for example, degree apprenticeship providers may identify the end-point assessment as a key transition point for their institution. The support put in place can reflect the distinctive needs of the student population.

Providers may find it useful to adapt this model when developing their own transition approach.



Implementing a transition approach

Common transition points

Table 2: Common transition points and examples of support

Transition point within the student journey	Examples of support (these examples are not comprehensive)
Pre entry	Clear application expectations, timelines and context to support informed decision making (including that given by agents)
Entry/induction	Identity formation, orientation, belonging-building activities, academic skill development, well-being information, signposting
Settling in / first year continuation	Ongoing check-ins, peer networks, encouragement to engage in co-curricular activities, study skills support, feedback on academic progression
Progression between modules/levels	Academic mentoring, career planning, opportunities to deepen engagement in subject/extracurricular, re-induction/ reorientation
Study abroad / placement (if applicable)	Pre-departure information, ongoing contact, and structured re-entry support
Transition into final year	Research skills support, career advice, well-being resources, strategies for workload management, re-induction/re-orientation
Preparation for next steps	Careers/employability, alumni connections, guidance on articulating skills and experience
Transition for students returning after breaks in learning	Ensuring student record and learning systems record return accurately, academic and well-being resources are highlighted, personal tutor and buddy allocated (if applicable), re-engagement with academic expectations and academic support to scaffold re-entry into learning

Student-specific transition points

Student-specific transition points require support to enable students to learn, thrive and succeed within their individual contexts. While institutional frameworks benefit from consistency, they can also be flexible enough to adapt to varied student circumstances. Some student groups will have transitional needs that can be anticipated, and these students often hold the expertise needed to shape effective, relevant support.

A transition approach grounded in co-creation actively involves students in identifying challenges and designing student-centred solutions. Their lived experience provides insight into barriers that may not be visible to staff. For example, working with transgender students may identify routine practices that inadvertently expose personal information. Collaborating directly with students allows providers to recognise these issues early, understand their impact, and prevent harm by embedding more inclusive approaches.

Students often face additional hidden burdens at transition points: managing competing responsibilities, navigating multiple support systems, or confronting administrative or logistical obstacles. Without reviewing policies through the lens of lived experience, institutions may unintentionally create inaccessible provision. For example, a 24-hour laptop loan scheme intended to address technological inequality may be unintentionally unavailable to students who cannot travel to campus daily.

Fostering belonging is central to any transition approach. It's important for students to see that their institution has expected someone with their needs, identities and circumstances to be part of the student body. This can be demonstrated by signposting to varied services, resources and community connections, such as through a [Black Services Directory](#). Encouraging engagement across a diverse staff and student body can also build a sense of belonging.



Key features of success

Here are some recurring features that are proven to make student experiences at key transition points more successful:

- **Structured induction / welcome programmes:** Helps students understand expectations, how to use support systems, begin to feel part of the academic and social community. Reduces early attrition. These sessions can be recorded in case students miss them or would like to review them later.
- **Mid-point survey:** Designed to identify where signposting or re-signposting of relevant support and other information would be beneficial.
- **Provider-wide student transition or student journey group:** Provides an opportunity for joined-up approaches to support key points of transition, and to include students in the co-creation of transition support plans.
- **Transition embedded into access and participation plans and education strategy:** Promotes equity and access and ensures coherence across academic teams, student services and well-being provision.
- **Peer mentoring / PAL:** Gives new students a peer guide, lowers anxiety, promotes belonging, gives role models.
- **Independent learning plans:** Supports students to manage their goals and expectations, identifying strengths and skill development.
- **Bridging/pre-entry or start-of-course support:** Helps students from non-traditional backgrounds, with lower prior academic confidence, or less preparation for higher education study.
- **Tailored early-warning/support systems:** Monitoring academic performance, continuation, engagement; sharing data; intervening early when students show signs of struggle helps to avoid drop-outs.
- **Robust academic and pastoral support:** Academic writing, referencing, study skills, as well as social/well-being support, help students adapt not only intellectually but also emotionally.
- **Ensuring students and staff are clear about the support options available:** Who to talk to and how to contact that support.



Reflective questions

Pre-entry

1. How do we convey information in order to set expectations about the requirements for study, allowing for informed decision making throughout?
2. How do we collate and act upon students' disclosed needs, enabling us to reduce barriers to entry from the start? How do we compare needs identified during the students' journey with pre-entry disclosures?

Entry and induction

3. How do we identify key transition points for different cohorts and plan to provide streamlined support?
4. How do we scaffold learning at induction, preventing overwhelm and ensure that students are able to navigate new academic, cultural and social environments?
5. How do we ensure students feel welcomed, understood and aware of the support available from the start?

Progression between modules/levels

6. How do we 're-onboard' students who may feel fatigued or disconnected after previous modules/levels or those who are resuming study after a break?
7. How do we recognise gaps in skills that have not yet been addressed and provide structured support to help students progress?
8. Are students' progression outcomes clearly communicated with timely, structured information on next steps provided?

Preparing for graduation

9. How and when do we discuss our students' longer-term goals (further study, employment, training) and recognise their pathway into and beyond learning?
10. How do we ensure that students can recognise and articulate their own skill development over the course of their studies, culminating in reflection on their student journey to create a sense of closure and pride in their achievements?

Overarching questions around support for transition

11. How do we measure the success of our transition support?
12. How are staff equipped and trained to support the transition needs of students?
13. When reflecting on our transition support, what mechanisms do we use to consider the power dynamics inherent to a support structure that promotes the agency and autonomy of our students?
14. What processes facilitate active collaboration with students to enable co-design of our approaches to transition?
15. What sources of student data (engagement, well-being, demographic, academic performance) inform transition interventions and are we confident our data sharing agreements allow us to use this data?

Scenario

Changing support needs

Context

Kritima is an international student with Crohn's disease. When she applies to her university, she chooses not to disclose this, as her symptoms are mild and she does not think it will affect her studies.

She initially lives close to the university but feels isolated and homesick so moves to live with family elsewhere in the country.

In her second year, she has a significant flare-up. As she now has a long-distance commute to her university, this has an impact on her ability to attend. Kritima is unsure who to contact to receive support.

Because her non-attendance raises a visa compliance concern, Kritima is asked to attend a formal meeting. During this meeting, Kritima feels overwhelmed and unable to disclose the reasons for her non-attendance.

Faced with being removed from her course, Kritima finally mentions her challenges.

Considerations

- What support at pre-entry, induction and other key transition points might have mitigated the challenges Kritima is facing in her second year?
- Could internal communication within the university have been improved so that Kritima's difficulties were recognised and responded to before the point of a formal meeting?
- How can the university recognise and respond to Kritima's changed needs as a student?



Key Practice c -
Awareness of ongoing
support services and
encouraging the use
of them

Key Practice c

Awareness of ongoing support services and encouraging the use of them

Students and staff are aware of the ongoing academic, professional and pastoral services and activities available, and students are encouraged to access these opportunities and support throughout their learning journey.

This Key Practice emphasises the promotion of support services and activities as an ongoing dialogue rather than a series of isolated interactions. It encourages consideration of students' needs at different stages of the learning journey, as well as the needs of diverse student populations. The Key Practice also highlights the value of using a range of communication methods and institutional levels to raise awareness of support and opportunities among both students and staff. Regular evaluation of these approaches can help identify what is most effective and inform continuous improvement.

The table below provides examples of common academic, professional and pastoral services and activities that students and staff may benefit from knowing about. The specific nature, structure and terminology of these services will vary across providers.



Table 3: Examples of academic, professional and pastoral services and activities

Academic	Professional	Pastoral
Learning development, such as study support, study skills, academic literacies, academic writing, maths support, exam skills	Careers and employability such as career consultations, CV and cover letter writing, part-time and graduate job opportunities, volunteering opportunities, careers fairs	Well-being services such as welfare and mental health support, pastoral tutors, student engagement officers, counselling, residential life activities, university GP services and other NHS partnerships
Library, such as referencing and academic practice support, individual and group study spaces	Placement teams, such as placement and internship opportunities, placement on-boarding and support	Disability support, for example disability advisers and mentors, provision of reasonable adjustments, access to Disabled Students Allowance, peer mentoring schemes
IT, for example, software support, digital and AI literacy tools	Professional skills training, such as access to online internal and external training resources, skills development sessions, virtual badges and certificates	Sports and active well-being, such as facilities, clubs, bursaries, healthy eating and catering plans
Extenuating circumstances / assessment mitigation and academic appeal processes, reasonable adjustments	External partners, for example, industry partners, employer release for studies, volunteering	Chaplaincy, for example chaplains for different religions, prayer spaces, accommodations during religious festivals
Academic/personal tutors or advisers	Extracurricular award schemes	Accommodation such as hall wardens, hall mentors, residential life activities
International student and study abroad teams		Financial support, such as hardship funds, bursaries, financial advice
Student representative body support services, activities and opportunities across all areas		

Creating an ongoing dialogue about support for all students

All staff play an important role in maintaining ongoing conversations with students about the support, services and opportunities available to them. This helps ensure that support is embedded throughout programmes and remains visible and accessible throughout the student journey. Partnership working with students, student representatives and student representative bodies can help ensure that these conversations are informed by the student voice and responsive to student needs.

Providers can also consider how they foster ongoing dialogue about the diverse needs and experiences of different student groups. In some cases, this may include developing targeted initiatives or tailored forms of support for specific groups of students.

As highlighted throughout this guidance, there are key points in the student journey when particular support services and activities are especially relevant. Providing consistent and regular information about available support helps to build awareness, encourage engagement and ensure students know where to seek help when they need it.

Considerations for raising awareness of support services and activities

- **Timeliness:** Key support services are highlighted at appropriate stages of the student journey, enabling staff to provide relevant information when it is most needed. Information that remains relevant throughout the year should be available at all times through accessible channels, such as virtual learning environments and institutional web pages.
- **Relevance:** It should be clear who services and activities are intended for and which are relevant to all students. Communication should reflect different modes and levels of study, programme types, and student circumstances. Staff in student-facing roles should have easy access to the information needed to effectively promote available support.
- **Clarity:** Information about support services and activities should be clear, concise and accessible to both students and staff. Institutions should consider whether there is a shared understanding of key terms, processes and expectations.
- **Consistency:** Messages should be accurate and consistent across all communication channels and platforms (see [Key Practice a](#)). Staff should know where to access up-to-date information and how to direct students to appropriate sources of support. Communication should be coordinated across departments, professional services and student representative bodies, reducing duplication and minimising the need for students to repeat information. Updates and changes should be communicated promptly and consistently.

- **Inclusivity:** Student support should reflect the diversity of the student population. Considerations may include:
 - culture
 - religion or belief
 - disability
 - neurodiversity
 - age
 - gender
 - sexual orientation
 - mode of study
 - level of study
 - students studying with partner organisations
 - students at international branch campuses.

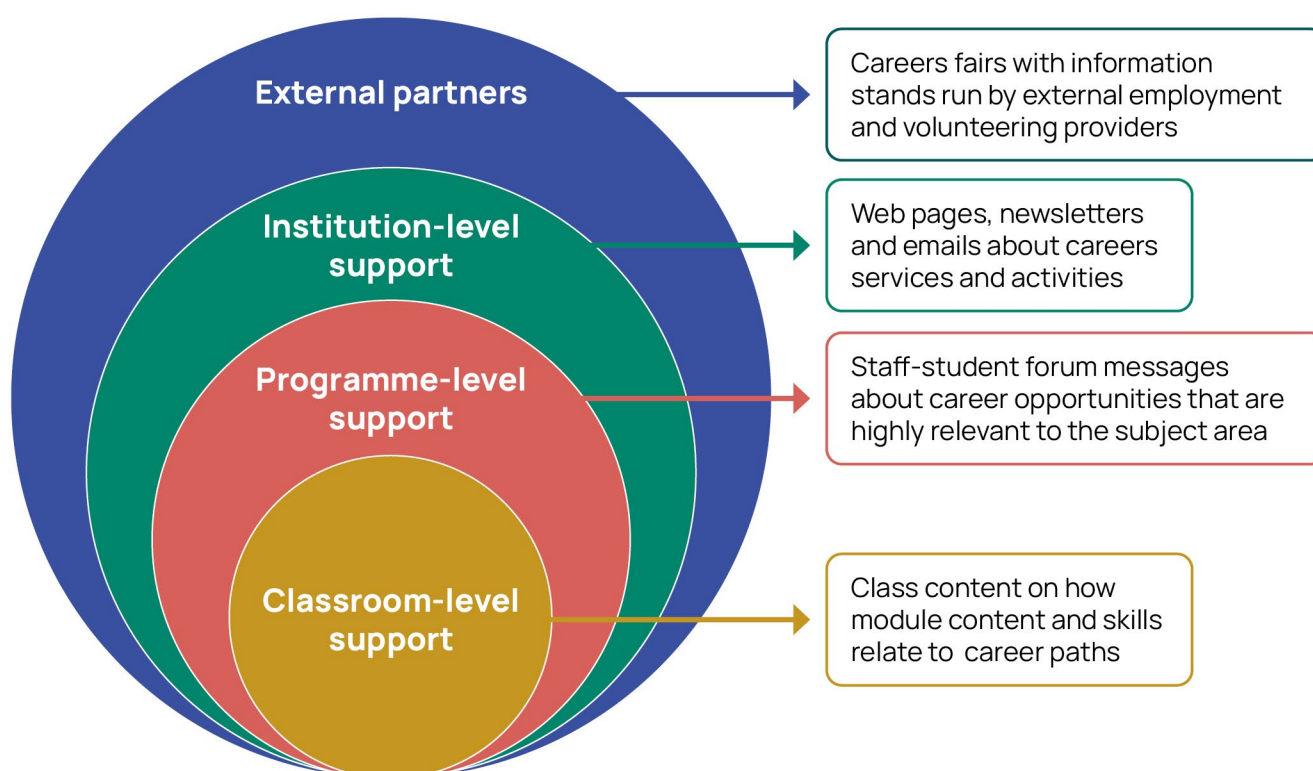
As outlined in [Key Practice a](#), information should be provided in accessible formats and be easy to navigate regardless of platform and developed with consideration to universal design principles as much as is practicable.

Embedding awareness of support and activities across the institution

To ensure students are aware of the support and activities available to them, information should be communicated clearly and consistently by support services across the institution. Staff should then actively signpost students to this information at relevant points throughout their student journey. This whole provider approach helps raise awareness of available support both before and at the point of need, while also demonstrating how opportunities and services are relevant and accessible to different student groups. Figure 6 illustrates how information about support can be embedded across an institution, using careers information as an example.



Figure 6: Targeted communication about careers services and activities across a provider



Monitoring and evaluation

Providers monitor whether students have received specific information about, or engaged with, services and activities where this is required by regulatory bodies. More broadly, monitoring and evaluation can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of support provision and communication.

Learner analytics, alongside data on the use of support services and participation in activities, can help assess the effectiveness of awareness-raising efforts. It can also identify whether students from specific programmes or subject areas, modes of study, or demographic groups are under or over-represented in accessing support and opportunities.

Evaluation of activities that is undertaken in partnership between students and staff can provide insight into whether communication about support has been timely, relevant, clear, consistent and inclusive. They can also help determine how effective different communication methods and institutional touchpoints have been, and where improvement may be needed.

Reflective questions

1. How do we communicate the range of academic, professional and pastoral services and activities available to students and staff?
2. How do we work in partnership with the student representative body or bodies to effectively communicate with students?
3. How often do we review and update the information shared about available services and activities? Who has responsibility for this?
4. What strategies and mechanisms do we use to actively encourage students to engage with opportunities and support throughout their learning journey?
5. Are our communication methods inclusive and accessible to all students in our institutional context, including those on different programme types and modes of study and those with additional needs or from diverse backgrounds?
6. Are there particular groups of students in our institution who are less likely to access support? If so, why might that be, and how can we address it?
7. How well-informed are staff about the services and activities available to students? How do we communicate changes, and how do we know these have been understood?
8. How do we ensure that information is consistent across platforms and different parts of the institution?
9. Do staff across the range of student-facing roles feel confident in signposting students to appropriate services or sources of information?
10. What professional development opportunities exist for staff to better understand and promote these services?
11. How do we monitor student engagement with academic, professional and pastoral services and activities?
12. What feedback mechanisms are in place and how is feedback used to improve the visibility, accessibility, uptake and effectiveness of services and activities?
13. How do we know whether our communication approaches with staff and students are effective?
14. What barriers exist that prevent students or staff from accessing or promoting services and activities?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Embedding support for specific demographics

Context

An International Student Office is keen to engage international students in workshops specifically designed to address the challenges these students face in the UK learning environment.

The Office has carefully developed workshop content in collaboration with subject experts and educators to ensure a positive learning experience. Using the provider's student data dashboard, it has identified students who are from various countries with a broad range of qualifications who have also passed the necessary English language test required for entry.

The International Student Office sent out an email inviting first-year international students to attend a workshop titled Academic English for International Students. The email was prompt, clearly written in plain English, and personalised by addressing each student by name. However, after the event, the workshop facilitator reported that only 10 students attended the session (less than 1% of the first-year international student population). The Office was disappointed with the overall turnout for this important skill development session.

Considerations

- What information related to the workshop could have improved the uptake of this session?
- What strategies at the programme level could be employed to enhance student engagement with the session?
- How could academic staff be involved in communicating and supporting students to attend the session?
- How could different communication methods be employed to enhance the awareness of the session among international students? Who could they have approached for help to do this?

Scenario 2: Addressing support around awarding gaps

Context

A department has identified an awarding gap related to ethnicity across its programmes. The Director of Teaching and Learning liaises with academic services to find out what support is available that might benefit the global majority of students in their programmes. They learn about a recent initiative where the Study Support Service curates a series of workshops specifically for enhancing academic skills among African and Afro-Caribbean heritage students.

The workshops were co-designed with students and have been advertised within university-wide student newsletters about academic support. However, monitoring data shows that uptake has been low, and the Director of Teaching and Learning finds that programme staff were unaware of the initiative and on further investigation neither was the Students' Union.

Considerations

- In what ways could communication about the workshop series potentially be improved across the provider?
- What important considerations can be made in the approach and language used when raising awareness of the initiative at the programme level?
- How could the institution further evaluate the effectiveness of how the initiative has been communicated to students?



Key Practice d - Staff are appropriately qualified, trained and supported to deliver high-quality learning and support

Key Practice d

Staff are appropriately qualified, trained and supported to deliver high-quality learning and support

Staff are appropriately qualified, trained and supported to deliver high-quality learning and support for all students, particularly those with specific needs and requirements

This Key Practice highlights the importance of establishing and developing a provider-wide approach to the arrangements for staff training and support to effectively meet the needs of all students. This includes the provision of high-quality teaching. Transparent arrangements are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning and the support provided to students. This may incorporate student outcomes and staff well-being.

Providers must ensure staff have the necessary qualifications required for their role at the point of entry or can achieve the necessary qualification required to deliver high-quality learning and support for all students. Additionally, ongoing staff development is required. A tiered approach may be an effective means of achieving this.

Table 4: Overview of core staff training needs

Tier	Support focus	Audience
Tier 1: Universal training	Core competencies (inclusive practice, referral awareness, cultural awareness)	All staff
Tier 2: Role-specific development	Enhanced skills, lifecycle integration, targeted support	Academic and professional services
Tier 3: Specialist expertise	Neurodiversity, specialist roles (eg mental health), peer support mechanisms	Designated leads and support teams

The diversity of the student body and the higher education landscape means that many students will experience higher education in varying ways. Providers might consider how they can achieve positive outcomes for all and align staff training to this. How information is presented to students at each stage of their student journey should be coherent and accessible, and articulate the expectations of success and achievement (see [Key Practice a](#) and [Key Practice c](#)).

Table 5: Staff capabilities for inclusive support and effective signposting mapped to student journey

Stage	Staff capabilities for inclusive support and effective signposting
Pre-arrival	• Cultural and internationalisation awareness • Clear, accessible communication and inclusive onboarding design • Understanding of admissions processes, widening participation and learning pathways
Arrival and orientation	• Creating an inclusive welcoming environment/ community • Engagement strategies for culturally, linguistically and generationally diverse students and those on different modes of study • Facilitating peer connection and belonging • Awareness of referral pathways (well-being, disability, financial support, academic support)
First year	• Academic advice and support • Early identification and intervention of students at risk of leaving • Awareness of neurodiversity and inclusive learning practices • Supporting digital confidence and blended learning skills
Mid-course	• Embedding support within curriculum and developing feedback literacy • Facilitating student voice and student partnership approaches • Career development conversations and future planning • Using engagement data and learning analytics to inform proactive support
Final year	• Supporting successful transition to graduate outcomes • Coaching reflective practice and career readiness • Supervising major projects with inclusive support approaches • Facilitating professional identity and employability development

Continued...

Stage	Staff capabilities for inclusive support and effective signposting
Graduation and beyond	• Connecting graduates with alumni networks and lifelong learning opportunities • Signposting to external careers, well-being and professional support services • Gathering evaluation, graduate feedback and using insights for continuous enhancement

The following are essential principles to underpin practices throughout the student journey:

- **Inclusive practices** (EDI, neurodiversity, intersectionality)
- **Timely, targeted, effective support** (triage, escalation, referral)
- **Staff peer support mechanisms** (mentoring, communities of practice)
- **Academic-professional integration** (shared language, joint problem-solving)
- **Cultural intelligence** (internationalisation, generational shifts)



Figure 7: Training requirements for staff at different points in a student journey

Pre-arrival	Arrival and orientation	First year	Mid-course	Final year	Graduation and beyond
Cultural competence and internationalisation awareness	Inclusive welcome practices	Academic advising and scaffolding	Curriculum integration and feedback literacy	Graduate outcomes alignment	Alumni engagement and employability pathways
Clear communications and onboarding process design	Generationally appropriate engagement strategies	Early intervention and retention strategies	Career readiness conversations	Reflective practice and transition coaching	Referral to external networks (careers, well-being)
Understanding of admissions processes and widening participation strategies	Peer support facilitation	Neurodiversity awareness	Student voice facilitation	Support for dissertation/project supervision	Evaluation and feedback loop integration
	Referral awareness (mental health, disability, financial support)	Digital literacy for blended learning	Data-informed support (eg engagement analytics)	Professional identity development	

Inclusive practices: (EDI, neurodiversity, intersectionality)

Timely, targeted, effective support: (triage, escalation, referral)

Staff peer support mechanisms: (mentoring, communities of practice)

Academic-professional integration: (shared language, joint problem-solving)

Cultural intelligence: (internationalisation, generational shifts)

Understanding responsibilities

Staff in support roles are likely to encounter students who will disclose difficulties and displaying signs of distress. Well-trained staff will be secure in their practice, and be able to respond appropriately, give effective responses and have confidence in making appropriate referrals to the correct support service. Institutions should ensure staff have access to clear support routes for themselves, acknowledging that they are often required to support students with distressing circumstances.

Staff recognition that some groups of students may find it difficult to seek support is important and consideration of this by providers is important. There is a need to be proactive in recognising unspoken need and ensure support is accessible to all.

A shared understanding between staff and students of their roles and responsibilities to enable students to achieve positive outcomes is ideal. This requires working collaboratively across a provider and with others, including employers who offer work-based learning/placements, other education providers and expert services offered by third party organisations.

Staff need to understand the policies and procedures for making timely and appropriate referrals to specialist support services, whether provided internally by the institution, externally, or through a combination of both. These policies and procedures need to be accessible to all staff and subject to regular review to ensure they remain evidence-informed, effective, and responsive to changing needs.

Evaluation may also consider the effectiveness of referral processes for students who do not initially engage with support through exploring how institutions identify students who are reluctant to access services, the approaches used to encourage engagement, and the extent to which these approaches lead to improved uptake of appropriate support.

Resourcing support activities

Where there are legislative requirements, providers are advised to consider:

- staff/student ratios across the key elements of the student journey
- the skill set needed to meet student support requirements
- the competence available to meet specific needs of students.

Providers will typically take a strategic approach to the provision for student support and identifying priorities for improvement. As part of this approach the consideration of staffing levels and skill mix is advised to ensure continuity and adequate resource to provide generalist and specialist support to the student body.

Ongoing identification and understanding of evolving student needs are important. This will enable a shared understanding of the lived experience of students and generate opportunities for co-production to develop specific training; identification of resources to meet support requirements should be considered and actively promoted.

Reflective questions

Staff training, and roles and capacity

1. How are staff training needs identified in relation to supporting all students, including those with additional or complex needs?
2. Do we have a clear institutional framework for academic and staff development that underpins consistent student support?
3. How well do staff understand their roles and responsibilities in enabling student success, and where are the boundaries between roles?
4. How do we ensure staff - including personal tutors, central support teams and teaching staff - receive accessible, ongoing training and support beyond initial induction?
5. How do we ensure sufficient staff capacity and appropriate workload allocation to deliver both teaching and student support effectively?

Partnerships and placement providers

6. How are the training needs of work based learning providers, placement partners and external organisations identified and supported?

Resources and accessibility

7. How accessible and visible are staff and student support resources across the institution?

Identifying need and signposting

8. How do we identify student support needs before programmes start, and how do we evaluate the effectiveness of this process?
9. How do we ensure that support is timely and responsive to emerging student needs?
10. What mechanisms ensure students understand what support is available and how to access it?

Evaluation

11. How do we use internal data sources and external metrics to identify students who may need additional support in the short and long term?
12. How effective are processes for students' evaluation of support mechanisms?
13. Where an attainment gap has been identified, what action has been taken to review this and to resolve it?
14. How do we use engagement data and feedback from staff and students to inform policy, strategy and practice?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Understanding policies and processes around supporting students

Context

A senior lecturer, teaches on a professional degree programme. They also hold a basic counselling qualification gained outside the institution.

Over time, they become concerned about their students' stress levels. Believing they can help, they begin to run informal support circles in their own time. They invite students to talk about their well-being and mental health, and some students come to them for one-to-one advice and support.

These activities are not connected to, or overseen by, any of the institution's formal student support structures. Students begin to see their lecturer as a trusted point of contact for well-being concerns. Some stop accessing university services altogether.

Eventually, a student experiences a crisis that the lecturer feels unable to handle. The situation escalates quickly, leaving both the student and the lecturer unsupported. Senior managers only become aware when a complaint is raised about the lack of joined-up support.

Considerations

Risk identification

- What are the risks to students when academic staff offer informal well-being support outside of structures?
- What risks exist for the member of staff and for the institution?

Staff knowledge and training needs

- What does this scenario suggest about staff understanding of:
 - The boundaries of their role?
 - When and how to signpost?
 - What support structures exist and how to access them?
 - What gaps in staff training or induction may have contributed to the lecturers actions?

Institutional systems and culture

- How might the provider in this scenario ensure that staff are confident about the limits of their duty of care?
- How might all staff be informed about referral pathways and how to explain them to students?
- Who should Dr. A have communicated with to ensure there was a clear understanding that personal qualifications (for example, counselling or coaching) do not extend an academic's professional remit?

Action planning

- What training interventions would reduce this risk (such as mandatory induction on boundaries, refresher workshops, guidance documents)?
- How can the institution monitor and support staff practice in this area?
- What messages should senior leaders reinforce about the culture of student support?

Scenario 2: Gaps in supporting international students

Context

A postgraduate student is studying in the UK for the first time. She is academically strong but faces a combination of challenges:

- she struggles with UK academic conventions such as critical analysis, independent study expectations, and referencing styles
- she feels isolated socially and is unfamiliar with how to access well-being or community support
- language differences make her hesitant to ask questions in lectures or seek clarification
- cultural attitudes towards mental health mean she is reluctant to seek help when she feels stressed or anxious.

At the same time, the institution has a range of support services (academic skills, well-being, language support, careers, visa advice), but these services are not well coordinated. Each service sits in its own silo with limited communication between them.

This results in:

- the student receiving multiple overlapping emails in unfamiliar terminology, which she finds confusing
- the student being expected to approach each service separately, and staff in one service are unaware of what support she is receiving elsewhere
- her academic tutor notices she is struggling but has no clear point of contact to coordinate support or to check whether the student is already receiving help.

Over time, the student begins to disengage, assuming that 'the system is too complicated' and that she is expected to cope on her own.

Considerations

Risk identification

- What risks does a fragmented support system create for international students?
- How might this affect student outcomes, well-being, and retention?
- What are the reputational risks for the institution in the global higher education market?

Staff experience

- What challenges do staff face in signposting students if services are not joined up?
- How does lack of clarity affect staff confidence in supporting international students?
- What training or resources could help staff navigate the system more effectively?

Institutional systems and culture

- How might this institution evaluate if services are communicating clearly and consistently with students, especially those unfamiliar with UK higher education?
- Should there be a centralised or coordinated model for international student support in this scenario?
- How important is it that services are visible and culturally accessible?

Action planning

- What steps could the institution take to make services more coherent and accessible?
- How can staff training be aligned with institutional change programmes to ensure students don't fall through the cracks when processes are changed or updated?
- What role should institutional leaders play in ensuring services are joined up and responsive to international student needs?



Key Practice e - Recognition of the value of activities outside of the formal curriculum

Key Practice e

Recognition of the value of activities outside of the formal curriculum

Students and staff recognise that activities offered outside the formal curriculum are beneficial for promoting students' sense of belonging, as well as providing opportunities to broaden their skills and achievements, complementing their formal studies.

Creating and supporting opportunities beyond the curriculum

Key Practice e focuses on the need for providers, staff and students to acknowledge, create, support and promote the value of activities and experiences beyond formal teaching and assessment to help foster a sense of belonging, employability, well-being and community.

Examples of such activities are:

- student societies and clubs
- volunteering opportunities
- mentoring schemes
- enterprise and entrepreneurship initiatives
- creative and cultural projects
- research opportunities
- work placements and internships
- competitions and challenges
- sports teams and clubs
- professional networking activities
- cultural events and activities
- community engagement and outreach initiatives
- representation and student voice activities.

Providers should ensure these opportunities are accessible, inclusive and meaningful, and that they enable students to develop skills, networks and confidence that support their academic, personal and professional growth. Providers might consider how activities outside the formal curriculum connect with academic study, and how students are encouraged to reflect on and articulate the outcomes of participation.

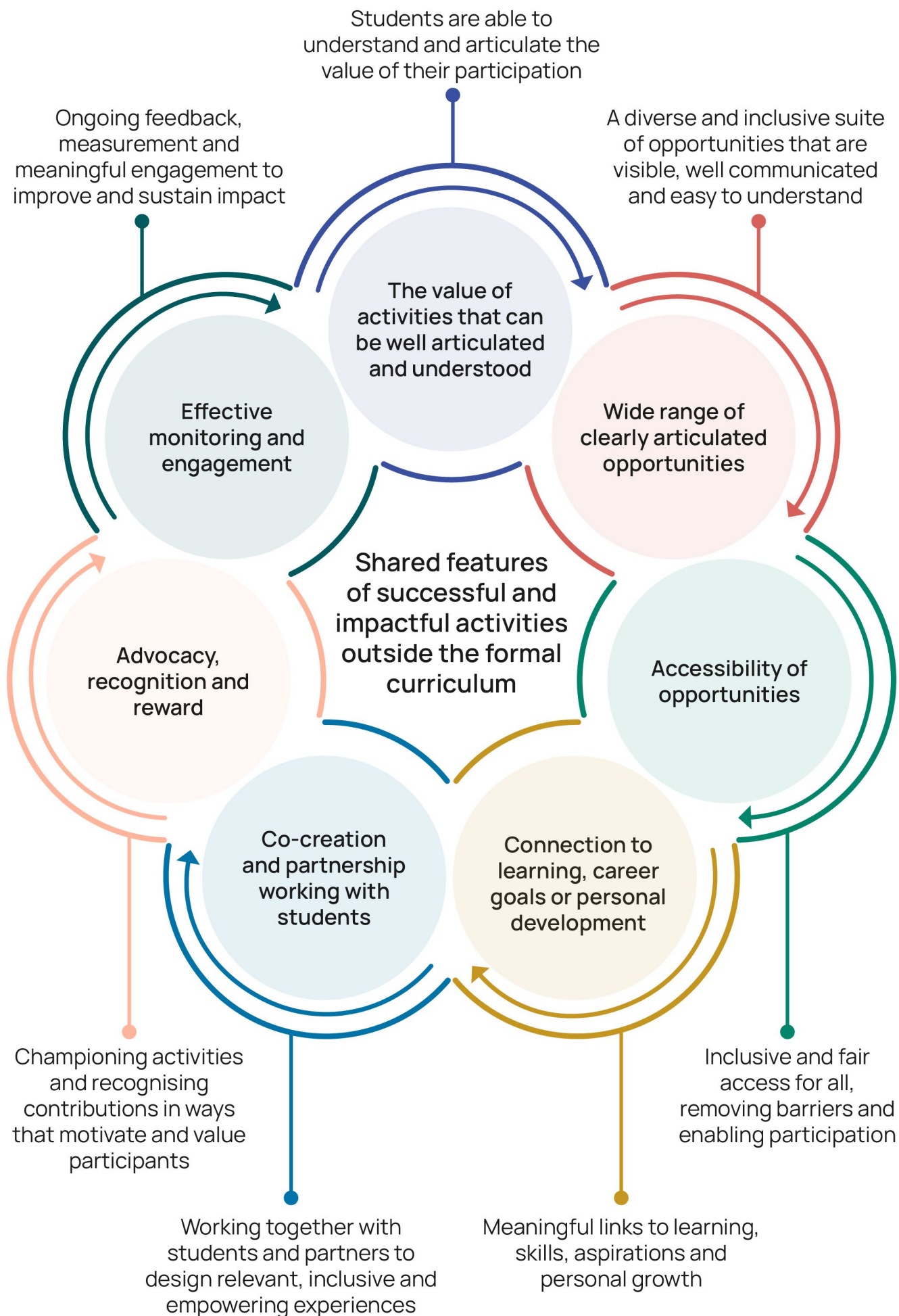
This Key Practice recognises that these activities can be instrumental in:

- enhancing students' personal and professional development
- supporting mental well-being and identity formation
- fostering a sense of belonging within the institution
- complementing academic learning and skill acquisition.

Given the diversity of provider types and student populations across UK tertiary education, providers are encouraged to consider how these activities can be supported and recognised in ways that reflect their context and diversity of provision. For activities to be successful and impactful, attention should be given to the interconnected features that apply across these activities illustrated in Figure 8.



Figure 8: Shared features of successful and impactful activities outside of the formal curriculum



Opportunities that are clearly articulated

A wide range of opportunities is important, but quantity alone will unlikely ensure student engagement or effective signposting for staff.

To ensure students are able to make informed choices about the opportunities on offer, they require clear and accurate information, presented in ways that make navigation simple (see [Key Practices a](#) and [c](#)). Staff and student representative bodies need to be made aware of the opportunities available to students to effectively signpost to them. As such, a coordinated approach to communicating information activities across an institution is essential to avoid information overload or indeed misinformation about activities.

Student opportunities that are accessible

To ensure inclusivity and accessibility in activities, providers need to ensure that students across the diversity of the student body are enabled to participate in the activities promoted.

When considering if co-curricular opportunities are accessible, providers are advised to consider and wherever possible reduce any barriers to participation.

Considerations may include:

- affordability - do they have hidden financial costs (travel, time away from work commitments)
- varied times - to enable those with caring responsibilities / in the workplace to attend
- varied locations/sites - to ensure students not at the main campus can attend
- different formats (for example, online and in person) - to cater for those with caring responsibilities or distance learners
- significant commuting time - many students are time and cash poor
- those with caring responsibilities
- those with a disability
- those who have faith commitments.

While it is recognised that not all activities may cater to every student need, providers might wish to explore the following to better demonstrate how equity might be embedded in the opportunities offered.

Examples of how this might be achieved are:

- incorporating bursary schemes
- hybrid options
- commuter-friendly schedules
- public transport discounts/vouchers
- recognition schemes
- option to claim back travel or prepay travel and subsistence.

Connection to learning, career goals or personal development

Promoting opportunities is easier and more likely to secure good engagement when visibly linked to academic study, career goals and personal development. Students recognise greater value in activities and opportunities when they are referenced in teaching, and when co-curricular work is aligned to learning outcomes or graduate attributes.

Where these connections are not explicit, activities can remain siloed, and students may struggle to justify the time they spend participating. Reviewing programme specifications, student portfolios and employer feedback support providers in identifying where activities align to learning and can be referenced accordingly. Providers may wish to consider mapping opportunities to graduate attributes, goals and communicating the links clearly to students, so that the value is tangible and accessible and in turn enable them to articulate the benefits of engaging with them.

Co-creation and partnership working with students

Activities outside the curriculum that take place within an institution are most powerful when shaped by students and staff in partnership. Co-creation builds ownership, strengthens belonging, and develops leadership skills. Enhanced practice is evident when students are engaged as partners to design, deliver and evaluate extra and co-curricular activities, ensuring that opportunities reflect diverse student interests, needs and experiences. See [Principle 2 - Engaging students as partners](#) for more detailed advice about working in partnership with students.

Advocacy, recognition and reward

Staff shape perceptions of co-curricular activities by displaying awareness of opportunities, signposting them in tutorials, and celebrating the benefits to and achievements of those involved. Their recognition raises the status of activities beyond the curriculum and signals that they are important.

When students share their own stories of involvement, new students are more likely to participate, and belonging grows through student networks rather than from information from the provider and its staff alone.

Enhanced practice is evident when staff consistently promote activities, and students talk positively about their own experiences across programmes, societies and informal networks. Equipping staff and student advocates of co- or extracurricular activity with accessible resources to promote them will encourage promotion across a provider.

[Principle 2 - Engaging students as partners, Key Practice e](#) speaks to the recognition and celebration of student contributions and providers are encouraged to consider how they recognise those involved in co-curricular activities

A shared recognition of the value of activities and experiences beyond the formal curriculum helps to position them as a key component of student development. This recognition is reflected in the extent to which staff actively promote and discuss these opportunities through teaching, advising and student support activities, and in students' ability to articulate the benefits and impact of their participation. For further advice and guidance on recognition and reward of activities see [Practice e of Principle 2 - Engaging Students as partners](#).

Recognising the effort and achievement of students who participate in activities beyond the curriculum not only recognises the student contribution but also highlights the impact and success of the wider curricular activities.

As outlined in [Principle 2 - Engaging Students as Partners, Practice e](#) the development of a framework for recognition and reward will offer a cohesive provider-wide approach ensuring that rewards are proportionate to the level of engagement/effort involved. Co-creating a framework with colleagues working in student engagement teams and student representative bodies alongside students will be ultimately beneficial and ensure the framework is widely adopted and understood.

Table 6: Different types of recognition and reward (summarised from [Principle 2 - Engaging Students as Partners, Key Practice e](#)):

Reward type	Examples of recognition and reward
Tangible rewards and career benefits Recognition that demonstrates skills, attributes and impact in ways valued by employers and academia	• Micro-credentials and digital badges provide verifiable records of skills • HEAR (Higher Education Achievement Report) formally acknowledges contributions • Additional credit - integration into optional modules or leadership training, reinforcing the link between engagement and employability • References/testimonials • Opportunities to attend events / present on behalf of the institution / student representative body
Community and peer recognition Publicly celebrating student contributions fosters belonging and visibility across a provider	• Student partnership awards • Leadership showcases • Institution/journal publications • Nomination for external awards
Financial and practical Activities undertaken by students are genuinely inclusive and mitigate/reduce any disadvantage of participation	• Offer of paid roles/activity (noting this can impact students on certain benefits) • Scholarships • Reimbursement of expenses / booked and paid in advance • Funded student fellowships • Bursary-linked enhancement roles

Understanding and articulating the value of activities

Students benefit from support to recognise, interpret and articulate the value of their participation in activities beyond the formal curriculum. Providers are reminded that the benefits of participation are not always self-evident, and involvement alone does not necessarily equip students with the confidence or language to describe the knowledge, skills, experiences and achievements they have gained.

Some students, particularly those with limited cultural or social capital, may find it more difficult to identify and communicate the outcomes of their participation. Targeted support can help students recognise the relevance and value of their experiences and express them in ways that are meaningful to them and recognised by others.

This support may be provided through academic and professional staff, careers and employability services, mentoring or other forms of personalised guidance. Workshops, tutorials, reflective activities and portfolio development can also help students develop the reflective and communication skills needed to articulate the impact of their participation and apply these insights in academic, personal and professional contexts.

Effective monitoring and evaluation

To ensure activities remain resourced and ultimately sustainable, providers will need to consider how they monitor, evaluate and ultimately assess the impact of these activities. Providers may consider building monitoring and evaluation of activities into existing student experience reviews, so to incorporate it into routine reflection rather than as an isolated exercise.

When planning activities, the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation need to be clear, to facilitate an understanding of what success looks like and to identify areas for enhancement (see [Principles 4 - Using data to inform and evaluate quality](#) and [Principle 5 - Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision](#) for more detailed information about monitoring and evaluation and the use of data).

The following areas may offer useful insight for monitoring and evaluation:

- demographics of those who participated
- cost analysis interrogating the resource required to coordinate/supervise activities versus take-up and benefits
- student feedback on the activities (ensuring representation from across the student body)
- reviewing reflective portfolios, student award submissions or employer feedback
- obtaining feedback from careers colleagues or employers to establish how well students/graduates articulate their skills and attributes gained through activities
- evaluation against strategic goals and regulatory monitoring of the institution - such as those for EDI or employability (for example) or access and participation plans
- staff feedback about the information and communication about activities
- evaluation of engagement in extracurricular activities and the impact on academic achievement.

Reflective questions

1. How do we currently recognise activities that are outside formal curriculum in our institution? Are our recognition processes transparent and accessible to all students?
2. How do we define, promote and communicate the value of activities outside the formal curriculum?
3. Do we have structures in place to collaborate with student representative bodies on the development and delivery of co- and extracurricular opportunities?
4. Do we privilege certain types of activities (such as volunteering, internships) over others, and why?
5. Do we ensure inclusivity for students with different circumstances (distance learners, carers, working students)?
6. In what ways do our students currently reflect on their informal learning experiences contributing to belonging, well-being and employability rather than being isolated from the academic experience?
7. How confident are our students in articulating the skills, values and attributes they gain through these activities?
8. How well are our staff trained to guide students in linking informal learning to belonging and employability?
9. Do we provide visual and textual resources that clearly map co-curricular learning to graduate outcomes?
10. How does recognition of informal learning contribute to our wider institutional strategy for employability and personal development?
11. How do we know whether our current offer of activities is engaging the full diversity of our student community - are we identifying and removing barriers to participation?
12. What changes have we made because of feedback from students about extracurricular activities?
13. How do we collaborate across departments to develop holistic student development opportunities?
14. How could we better integrate co- and extracurricular achievements into students' academic or professional portfolios?
15. How can technology enhance the recognition and reflection process for students in relation to their co- and extracurricular achievements?

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Embedding reflection in a further education college

Context

A further education college finds that although participation in local volunteering is strong, students struggle to explain the value of these activities.

In response, the college introduces a digital portfolio tool where students record and reflect on their experiences. Tutors use portfolio entries in personal tutorials to guide conversations about goals and employability. Careers services integrate the portfolio into guidance, enabling students to export reflections into CVs and professional profiles. Employer feedback confirms that graduates demonstrate greater self-awareness and skill articulation.

Considerations

- In what ways can tutors engage in guiding meaningful reflective conversations?
- How can the careers service be integrated to strengthen employability alignment?
- How can a digital portfolio be effectively embedded into curriculum structures?
- How can employer feedback loops be used to evaluate impact and inform improvement?

Scenario 2: Commuter students and flexible access

Context

A student support team identifies low participation in societies and volunteering among commuter students who balance study with family and work commitments. To address this, they co-design short lunchtime workshops and hybrid weekend community projects with commuter students and local partners.

Small bursaries are offered to offset travel costs, and staff receive briefing packs to signpost opportunities in tutorials. Student ambassadors from commuting backgrounds share stories of participation, encouraging authenticity and relevance. Within a year, participation rates rise significantly, and feedback highlights stronger belonging and reduced isolation.

Considerations

- What would we do in this situation?
- How can flexible scheduling, including hybrid and weekend options, better support diverse student needs? How do we secure staff buy-in to support this?
- How might participation be improved further?
- What forms of financial support can effectively address the hidden costs students face?
- How can staff briefings be used to embed consistent advocacy across teams?
- How can peer advocacy be strengthened through commuter student ambassadors?

Terminology

Term	Definition
Academic services	The professional services departments responsible for the administrative, technical and regulatory infrastructure that supports and delivers teaching, learning and research.
Co-curricular activities	Activities linked to the academic programme but not credit-bearing, such as volunteering, mentoring or skills workshops.
Digital badges	Micro-credentials awarded for participation in structured learning or development activities outside the curriculum.
Extenuating/ mitigating circumstances	Circumstances beyond a student's control or ability to foresee that seriously impair their ability to study or complete their assessed work to their usual standard.
Extracurricular activities	Activities outside formal academic structures, including societies, sports, cultural projects and enterprise competitions.
Framework for support	A structured model that describes how a provider enables students to access, participate, succeed, progress and thrive throughout their learner journey. It brings together academic, personal, financial, well-being and career support into a coordinated system that scaffolds their student experience.
Learning journey	The end-to-end experience a student/learner has with a higher/ tertiary education provider, from initial awareness of study opportunities through to graduation and alumni engagement.
Pastoral service	Support provided to students relating to their personal well-being, including mental health, welfare and general guidance beyond academic matters.
Professional services	Encompass the administrative and developmental departments that support students, manage institutional records and ensure regulatory compliance.
Reasonable adjustments	Under the Equality Act (2010), providers have a legal duty to remove or reduce barriers faced by disabled students through reasonable adjustments.
Recognition schemes	Institutional mechanisms (such as awards, certificates, digital badges or transcript recognition) used to formally acknowledge student participation.
Sense of belonging	The feeling of being accepted, valued and included within a learning community.

Term	Definition
Student engagement	The active and meaningful participation of students, both individually and collectively, in the quality and enhancement of their educational experience. Student engagement results in the improvement of their educational experience as well as benefiting the wider student body, institution and sector.
Student portfolio	A digital or physical collection of work whereby students document and reflect on their development, often used to support employability or progression and in some disciplines are required for assessment purposes.
Value literacy	The ability of students to understand, articulate and evidence the skills and benefits gained from activities.

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Continue exploring the Advice and Guidance

This publication is part of a suite of Advice and Guidance that accompanies the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024](#).

Select the Principles below to access additional guidance, practical considerations and resources that support the enhancement of quality and the maintenance of academic standards.

Principle 1

Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards



Principle 2

Engaging students as partners



Principle 3

Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience



Principle 4

Using data to inform and evaluate quality



Principle 5

Monitoring, evaluating, and enhancing provision



Principle 6

Engaging in external quality review and accreditation



Principle 7

Designing, developing, approving, and modifying programmes



Principle 8

Operating partnerships with other organisations



Principle 9

Recruiting, selecting and admitting students



Principle 10

Supporting students to achieve their potential



Principle 11

Teaching, learning and assessment



Principle 12

Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes





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