



STEP

Scotland's Tertiary
Enhancement Programme

STEP Network Members' Guide

2024-25

You have received this document because you are one of your institution's named members of the STEP Network. If you think you have maybe received this in error, please contact info@step.ac.uk or consult your colleagues.

We have produced this document to support members of the STEP Network in session 2024-25. It contains a lot of information with which you may already be familiar, but some will be new. We recommend that you read the sections entitled '**What is my role as a member of the STEP Network?**' and '**How will QAA and CDN support me in my role?**' and then keep this handy as a reference document.

We will update this document each year to ensure that it accurately reflects the role of STEP Network members as we move through the different phases of the programme.

QAA and CDN

May 2025



1 What is STEP?

[STEP \(Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme\)](#) is the new national enhancement programme for the Scottish tertiary sector. It is designed to enable Scotland's colleges and universities to work together to improve and enhance learning, teaching, the student experience, and staff development across tertiary provision. It is one of the delivery mechanisms of [Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework \(TQEF\)](#) and is underpinned by the TQEF principles. At the heart of the programme are collaborative enhancement projects that will produce outcomes and outputs of value to the entire tertiary sector.

STEP runs on a four-year cycle that moves through three distinct phases – Discovery, Implementation, and Reflection – during which projects are designed, delivered, and evaluated. The programme is sector-owned and jointly managed by the [Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\)](#) and [College Development Network \(CDN\)](#).

During the **Discovery** phase (year 1), staff and students will come together for a series of Discovery Days to establish collaborative partnerships and design projects that will form the core of the programme. Between these days, there will be four Navigation Sessions to provide support and maintain momentum. In developing projects there will be a focus on collaboration, clarity of outcomes and impact, and the formation of a cohesive programme of work that involves every college and university in Scotland.

The focus of the **Implementation** phase (years 2 and 3) is to launch and conduct the projects planned during the Discovery phase. Project leads and teams will be responsible for taking forward the programme of work identified in their proposals. In each of years two and three, the following activities will take place:

- Facilitated Implementation Days enabling project teams to meet in person
- A further Discovery Day to support development of further projects on emerging issues
- Annual conference to share updates, develop networks, and identify new opportunities
- Topic-related CPD for which a need has been identified.

Evaluation will be embedded within each project and undertaken on a continuous basis, with regular reports from each team updating on impact and progress against plans.

In the **Reflection** phase (year 4), summative evaluation of the STEP programme and its constituent projects and additional activities will be undertaken to consider the impact and effectiveness of the work. As projects conclude, the Reflection phase allows for the dissemination of project outputs throughout and beyond the sector. More fundamentally, an aim of the Reflection phase is to ensure that outputs and outcomes are embedded within the mainstream activities of colleges and universities to become 'business as usual'.

Also built into the Reflection phase is consultation on the topic for the next four-year STEP cycle. This process will involve colleges, universities, sector agencies and other stakeholders agreeing on the topic that is most relevant to the Scottish sector at that time.

2 What is the current STEP topic?

The topic for the first cycle of STEP (2024-2028) is **Supporting Diverse Learner Journeys**. This topic was determined through extensive engagement with colleges and universities during 2023-24, including sector-wide co-creation events in October 2023 and March 2024 and a sector-wide survey in April 2024. The same engagement with the sector highlighted four priority areas:

- Supporting Transitions and Exploring Pathways
- Strengthening Engagement, Community and Belonging
- Developing Skills and Capabilities for Learning
- Delivering Tailored, Targeted and Personalised Support.

Think of these priority areas as a guide, rather than 'hard and fast' categories – there is likely to be overlap between them, with some projects falling into more than one area. For example, a project aimed at providing tailored support for students with English as a second language might also aim to strengthen those students' sense of belonging.

3 What is the STEP Network?

The STEP Network is the largest of three groups responsible for the governance of STEP. The other two governance groups are the Steering Group and the Topic Leadership Group. Membership of all three groups is drawn from across the sector to ensure that STEP is owned by our colleges and universities, but **the STEP Network is the only group with representation from every college and university**: one staff member and one student member, nominated by the institution. The membership also includes representatives from key sector agencies.

The STEP Network provides a space for institutional staff and students and sector agencies to work together, engendering a sense of sector ownership and deepening the breadth and depth of engagement. It is this group that undertakes the key developmental work of projects to be undertaken in each STEP cycle.

The STEP Network is chaired by the Topic Staff and Student Leads (see below), supported by QAA and CDN.

3.1 Steering Group

The Steering Group, made up of members from key sector groups, provides strategic leadership and direction and is accountable for the successful delivery of STEP. The Group approves the overarching STEP topic and priorities, sets aims and objectives, approves STEP projects, and establishes the STEP Topic Leadership Group for each cycle. Steering Group members are responsible for ensuring information flows between the Steering Group and the other groups they represent. The Steering Group meets a minimum of three times a year and is co-chaired by a representative from each of the college, university, and student bodies.

3.2 Topic Leadership Group

The Topic Leadership Group provides operational leadership as well as topic-specific and evaluation expertise for each new cycle of STEP. It reports on a regular basis on the progress and impact of the work of the work it is supporting through STEP to the Steering Group. It also facilitates the exchange of learning between project teams and champions the work of STEP.

The Topic Leadership Group meets approximately every eight weeks, with the STEP Topic Leads (see below) sharing chairing responsibilities.

The diagram below illustrates how the three governance groups work together. You can find more information about the composition and membership of each group on the [STEP website](#).



3.3 Topic Leads

A core team of four individuals – two Topic Staff Leads and two Topic Student Leads, representing both colleges and universities – act as key sector-level leads, championing STEP across Scotland and driving forwards the enhancement ambitions of the sector. STEP Topic Staff Leads are appointed for the duration of each STEP cycle, and Student Leads will be in place for at least one year. They are members of the STEP Topic Leadership Group, observers on the Steering Group and also support meetings of the STEP Network.

Your Topic Leads for Supporting Diverse Learner Journeys are:

- Student Topic Lead (university) – Adelayo Adebayo, University of Stirling
- Student Topic Lead (college) – Chloe Sandilands, New College Lanarkshire
- Staff Topic Lead (university) – Professor Steve Tucker, University of Aberdeen
- Staff Topic Lead (college) – Dr Derek Robertson, City of Glasgow College

4 What is my role as a member of the STEP Network?



Champion STEP



Engage with Discovery Days



Engage with Navigation sessions



Support the evaluation of STEP



Support your student colleague (Staff rep only)



Ensure funding is used to support engagement (Staff rep only)

4.1 Champion STEP and disseminate our collective work within your institution

Key to the success of STEP will be sector engagement beyond the governance groups. It is therefore very important that STEP Network members help to share our work.

For the duration of your time as a STEP Network member, you will be one of two main points of contact for this work in your institution (staff or student). Your role is to promote STEP in general and to support the dissemination of the work we are doing together. You will know best how to do this within your institution or students' association, but here are some ideas to get you started:

- Encourage staff and students to visit the [STEP website](#) and to [sign up to the mailing list](#).
- Get to know your comms team if you don't already. Ask them which channels of communication they find most effective. Are your staff and students most engaged through social media? Blogs? Email? Can you get a 'STEP slot' in any regular newsletters that go out?

- Have a look at your calendar. Are there any events coming up that relate to our topic, such as Learning and Teaching conferences? Might the audience be interested in hearing about STEP?
- What are the key committees and other groups within your institution or students' association whose members might need to know about STEP? Could you ask for a slot on the agenda, or include an update in the papers?
- On a more individual level, are there any colleagues in particular who you think might be interested in this STEP topic? Think about the priority areas and the projects that we are developing: you may wish to speak to colleagues in student-facing services (for example, those working in counselling or careers services), as well as educators.

4.2 Engage fully with the Discovery Days

During the year, staff and students will come together for a series of Discovery Days to establish collaborative partnerships and design projects that will form the core of the programme. Discovery Days will include a mix of networking, teamworking and CPD activity. You will get to hear from other teams about their projects, as well as working on your own.

STEP One: Who are we and what are our challenges? (4 December 2024, Stirling Court Hotel)

The purpose of the first Discovery Day was to introduce STEP and its first topic. We spent some time getting to know each other and began to explore our common challenges and potential solutions.

STEP Two: How will we work together? (29 January 2025, Glen Mhor Hotel, Inverness)

The second Discovery Day more firmly established teams and saw us start work on project proposals. You started to think about the rationale for what you want to do in years 2 and 3.

STEP Three: How will we know we are making a difference? (26 March 2025, The Studio, Glasgow)

The third Discovery Day had an emphasis on impact. Your team considered the outcomes, indicators and evaluation of your project.

STEP Four: How will we deliver? (28 May 2025, Apex Hotel, Dundee)

By this stage, your team will be working through the details of your project proposal. What activities will you deliver? What resources will you require? How will you manage the project? What are the risks?

By the end of the final Discovery Day, we should have a number of well-developed project proposals, as well as a good sense of how the programme will look in years 2 and 3.

4.3 Engage fully with the Navigation Sessions

Following each of the Discovery Days, CDN will offer 2-hour online Navigation Sessions. The purpose of these sessions is to surface the key thoughts, ideas and questions that participants have had since the Discovery Days, and to identify next steps on their journeys.

The Navigation Sessions will use the Open Space method – a technique for running meetings where the participants create and manage the agenda themselves. This method is well suited to the context of STEP, because it enables participants to work with what emerges from the Discovery Days.

Participants are invited to reflect on the Discovery Day and identify topics or questions that they believe are important to discuss further.

Navigation sessions will take place on:

- 20 January 2025
- 17 March 2025
- 28 April 2025
- 9 June 2025.

4.4 Support the evaluation of STEP

During the year, colleagues from QAA and CDN will be seeking feedback on how the programme is running. Please support us in this activity by helping us to understand what is going well and what could be improved upon. You may be asked to complete a short online survey and/or take part in discussions at Discovery Days, Navigation Sessions or participate in focus group activity.

4.5 Support your student colleague (staff representative only)

If you are the staff representative for your institution, it is your responsibility to make sure that you are in regular contact with your student representative and ensure that they are supported to engage with STEP.

We also ask that you are familiar with your institution's safeguarding policies. If your student representative is under 18, please check whether parental consent is required for attendance at STEP events and obtain emergency contact information if this is required by your institution. This is especially important where students may need to stay at a venue overnight.

4.6 Ensure that your STEP funding is used to support engagement with the programme (staff representative only)

Each university and college in Scotland will receive £3000 of funding to support engagement with STEP in session 2024-25. QAA Scotland has contracted with a key quality contact in each institution – if you are your institution's staff member on the STEP Network, this may be you, but if not then **please ensure that you are able to access this funding**.

Each institution will determine how this funding can best be used to support engagement with STEP, but here are some indicative uses:

- To cover travel and subsistence for attendance of STEP Network members, or alternative institutional representatives, at Discovery Days or other in-person STEP events (excluding in-person meetings of the other governance groups)
- To support the creation and implementation of internal mechanisms to embed STEP institutionally, such as an institutional STEP Team

- To recognise student contribution in engaging with STEP work, such as working on project proposal development outside of Discovery Days
- To run internal events to raise awareness of STEP and the STEP topic, such as staff and student conferences or workshops
- To support institutional work relating to the STEP topic.

An additional £100 is to be paid to each student member of the STEP Network for attendance at each of the Discovery Days (totalling £400 per student member over the first year). This will be paid to the institution along with the £3000, and it is the responsibility of each institution to pay their student STEP Network members directly (recognising that there may be different mechanisms for doing this in different institutions) **This should be paid regardless of whether the student member is a sabbatical officer. If this level of funding is insufficient, you can use some of your £3000 to provide additional support.**

QAA has issued a contract to each institution for £3,400. £2,000 of funds was paid upon receipt of a copy of this contract signed by Principal/VC or equivalent, and submission of an invoice to QAA. A further £1,400 will be paid on receipt of a completed evaluation report, outlining institutional engagement with STEP in year 1. A template for this report has been made available, and the completed template should be returned to QAA by **30 June 2025**.

5 How will QAA and CDN support me in my role?

We will:

- Provide regular updates for you to share
- Provide access to CDN's Dissemination Guide

5.1 Provide regular updates for you to share

We produce a STEP Bulletin after each of our Discovery Days and at other key points as STEP progresses. They are intended to be short, accessible, and engaging updates on STEP to support dissemination of our collective work. We would encourage you to share as widely as possible within your institution.

5.2 Provide access to CDN's Dissemination Guide

CDN have produced an excellent Dissemination Guide with pointers about how to promote and embed your work. We would encourage you to use it in planning and managing your projects.