



STEP Bulletin February 2026

Welcome to the sixth STEP Bulletin. We produce these after each of our in-person meetings of the STEP Network 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. Please do also bring your colleagues' attention to our website – step.ac.uk – and encourage them to sign up to our mailing list.

Reflections on STEP Five

At-a-glance:

- Over 70 staff and students joined us for our first in-person meeting of 2025-26
- Members received updates on the progress of two projects – Student Engagement and TAPPS – before spending the rest of the day working in project teams
- Members were updated about two new projects relating to student support
- We announced details of the 2026 STEP Conference

Our second in-person meeting of the year took place in Edinburgh on Tuesday 27 January. As with our previous meeting, there were weather warnings in place, leading to some attendees asking whether QAA and CDN colleagues have a knack for picking difficult dates for meetings! Despite the wind and rain, 70 students and colleagues from Scottish colleges, universities and sector agencies joined the event in person. Additionally, we were able to support a hybrid meeting for one team whose members include colleagues from UHI Orkney and UHI Shetland. This allowed a further five colleagues to engage in the event.

Spotlighting projects

The day opened with updates from two of the STEP project teams. Chase Greenfield and Liz Cook from the project **Strategies to support student engagement and partnership within an increasingly time-poor and cash-poor student population** not only updated colleagues on progress, but used their slot to pilot some of the questions they will be asking in their student workshops. Cameron Graham and Alison Bell from the **Transforming Assessment Policy and Practice in Scotland (TAPPS)** project then updated us on their work, which is already generating insights and case studies about the impact that transforming assessment can

make. Team TAPPS left us with a provocation, asking whether Scotland should have a national tertiary sector assessment policy for all institutions and policy bodies.

Both teams are looking for engagement from other institutions: the Student Engagement project would welcome pilot workshop participants for their Student Voice and Representation strand, as well as overviews of pre-arrival material and institutions (primarily universities) for focus groups on this topic. TAPPS are seeking support to promote their work in institutions and would also welcome testimonials from across the sector. If you can help either team, please contact the Project Leads directly, or email info@STEP.ac.uk and we can put you in touch.

Making progress

After a quick break we moved into our breakout spaces, where teams spent much of the day working together on their projects. It is wonderful to hear teams getting into deeper conversations about the substantive content of these projects, and exciting to see things progressing.

New developments

Emma MacIsaac (our College Student Topic Lead) and Megan Brown (QAA) closed the day by inviting colleagues for their reflections. As at our previous events, we had run a Menti poll to allow colleagues to submit questions and suggestions throughout the day. This surfaced the frequent use of acronyms and initialisms without explanation – something for us all to reflect on, especially given our Language Accessibility Promise project.

There were also two important pieces of news. First, our open call for projects relating to student support resulted in two successful bids. **Supporting neurodivergent students with professional dialogue in work-based learning settings** will be led by the University of Aberdeen, while **Pathways to personal support: a collaborative model for tailored guidance for STEM students across the Scottish tertiary system** will be led by Robert Gordon University. Both projects are co-led by North-East Scotland College. Congratulations to both teams – we look forward to welcoming you along to future STEP events!

Second, we are delighted to announce that the 2026 STEP Conference will take place on Wednesday 27 May 2026 at Glasgow Caledonian University. **Stepping Over the Threshold: Inclusion and Belonging in Scotland's Tertiary Sector** will be open to students and staff from all Scottish colleges, universities and sector agencies. Further information about getting involved will follow in due course. In the meantime, please share this information with your colleagues.

Our next STEP Network meetings are Online Support Session 6 (17 February, MS Teams) and STEP 7 (25 March, Forth Valley College). Online Support Session 6 will strengthen project delivery and engagement strategies, exploring stakeholder analysis, effective communication planning, and communication in risk management.