



STEP

Scotland's Tertiary
Enhancement Programme

STEP Network Members' Guide

2025-26

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 2025-26. It contains a lot of information with which you may already be familiar, but some will be new. We recommend that you keep it 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

November 2025

1. What is STEP?

[STEP \(Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme\)](#) is the 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 one), staff and students came 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 were four Navigation Sessions to provide support and maintain momentum. In developing projects there was 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 two and three) 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:

- In-person events to progress work already underway and 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 four), 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 strengthening 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 representatives from colleges and universities.

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 forward 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 support meetings of the STEP Network.

Your Topic Leads for 2025-26 are:

- Student Topic Lead (university) – Adelayo Adebayo, University of Stirling
- Student Topic Lead (college) – Emma MacIsaac, North East Scotland College
- 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?

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 are underway: 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 at least one STEP Project

For information on the projects that are currently running, please see the Projects section of this document. Up-to-date information on the projects will also be available on the STEP website.

There are a number of roles within projects. Each team has a **Lead**. Most teams also have a **Co-lead** to ensure that both colleges and universities have opportunities to lead the project. Most other team members are **collaborative partners** – that is, they are fully attached to a project and expect to be present at all team meetings etc. Some teams also include **consultative partners**. These might be people who are happy to act as a ‘critical friend’ to the project or otherwise just want to be kept up-to-date with its progress.

Finally, each project has a **Key Contact**, a member of staff at CDN and QAA who can be on hand to support them and monitor progress.

You will find a list of project roles and responsibilities at the bottom of this document. CDN and QAA have developed separate guidance about the responsibilities of Project Leads and Key Contacts, and this has been shared with project teams.

4.3. Engage fully with the in-person STEP meetings

During the year, staff and students will come together for a series of in-person meetings to work on the projects that form the core of the programme. These meetings will include a mix of teamworking, networking and CPD activity. You will get to hear from other teams about their projects, as well as working on your own.

Student STEP Network members will be entitled to a £100 per diem for each of the four in-person days they attend. This will be paid in the form of a digital gift card after the meeting. To receive this, you will need to complete a Volunteering Agreement on the day. This is a short form but contains important information about tax and visa implications, so you should read it carefully.

STEP Five (Tuesday 18 November 2025, Fife College)

The STEP Network's first meeting of session 2025-26 will take place at Fife College. All project teams will have an opportunity to update the wider Network on their progress and seek engagement from colleagues. Teams will then have an opportunity to work together to progress their projects. We will also reflect on whether anything is missing from our programme of work. Time will also be built in for networking and support.

STEP Six (Tuesday 27 January 2026, University of Edinburgh)

The STEP Network's second meeting of session 2025-26 will take place at the University of Edinburgh. Two project teams will have an opportunity to update the wider Network on their progress. Teams will then have an opportunity to work together to progress their projects. Time will also be built in for networking and support.

STEP Seven (Wednesday 25 March 2026, Forth Valley College)

The STEP Network's third meeting of session 2025-26 will take place at Forth Valley College. Two project teams will have an opportunity to update the wider Network on their progress. Teams will then have an opportunity to work together to progress their projects. Time will also be built in for networking and support.

STEP Eight (Tuesday 26 May 2026, Glasgow Caledonian University)

The STEP Network's final meeting of session 2025-26 will take place at Glasgow Caledonian University. Two project teams will have an opportunity to update the wider Network on their progress. Teams will then have an opportunity to work together to progress their projects. Time will also be built in for networking and support. We will close the day with reflections on the second year of STEP.

4.4. Engage fully with the Online Support Sessions

Following each of the in-person meetings, CDN will offer 2-hour Online Support Sessions. The purpose of these sessions is to offer additional CPD around specific aspects of project management. We will shape these sessions based on what you tell us you need, so please let us know if there are any specific topics you would like to explore.

Online Support Sessions will take place on Teams on the following dates:

- Tuesday 9 December 2025, 2-4pm
- Tuesday 17 February 2026, 2-4pm
- Tuesday 28 April 2026, 2-4pm
- Wednesday 10 June 2026, 2-4pm

4.5. 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, participate in focus group activity, and/or take part in discussions at in-person meetings or Online Support Sessions.

4.6. Support your student colleague (staff representative only)

If you are the staff representative for your institution, it is your responsibility to ensure that you are in regular contact with your student representative and 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.

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

5.1. Provide regular updates for you to share

We produce a STEP Bulletin after each of our in-person meetings 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 guidance on dissemination

CDN have produced an excellent [Project 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.

6. STEP Network Student Members: Selection and Handover

6.1. Selection

In most institutions, the STEP Network Student Member will change over the summer. Institutions should work in partnership with their students' associations to select their STEP Network Student Member. It is expected that in most cases the role will be undertaken by the elected student officer with an education remit. First refusal for the role should therefore be offered to the person in this position. In some students' associations, this remit is held by a specific post, such as a VP Education, while in others the remit is held by the President.

If the elected officer does not have the capacity to take on the role, the students' association should identify an appropriate deputy to take on the role. For example, this could be another student officer or a senior student rep (such as a School or Department Rep). If the student selected to be the STEP Network Student Member is not an officer, then a clear line of communication should be established and maintained between the officer and the student lead, with opportunities for regular communications throughout the year.

Students' association staff should be a key part of the process of selecting the STEP Network Student Member and should also be part of the support system for the student in this role throughout the year.

6.2. Handover

Where the role is moving from one elected officer to another, this should be embedded as part of the students' association's handover and induction process for officers. Where either or both of the outgoing and ingoing leads are not elected officers, a handover process should be put in place. Ideally, this should involve a face-to-face meeting. At the very least, the outgoing student lead should provide a written summary of their time in the role and the key things the ingoing student lead should know.

Incoming STEP Network members will normally be expected to join the same project as their predecessor. This is because members did a lot of work in the Discovery year to identify which projects were best aligned with their institution's strategic priorities. It's also partly to support continuity, and because the projects have been costed based on their numbers of team members.

Appendix 1: STEP Projects running in 2025-26

For up-to-date information on which institutions are involved with which projects, as well as the project aims and outputs, please refer to the [Projects page on the STEP website](#).

Project	Status
Transition Learning	Launched in 2024-25 and now concluding – report to follow
Student Success through Institutional Tertiary Alignment: Pathways, Process and Design to Enable Student Success	Launched in 2024-25 and now concluded – details on website
Pedagogy for Transitions: Setting Students Up for Success through Enquiry Based Learning	Launched in 2024-25 and now concluding – report to follow
Appreciating Belonging and Enabling Change: From Strategy to Practice	Launching in 2025-26
Regional Enhancement and Collaboration in Tertiary Scotland (REACTS)	Launching in 2025-26
Strategies to support student engagement and partnership within an increasingly time-poor and cash-poor student population	Launching in 2025-26
Supporting access, progression and successful outcomes in disabled student communities (SAPSO)	Launching in 2025-26
Understanding the staff development landscape required to support diverse learner journeys in the tertiary sector	Launching in 2025-26
Transforming Assessment Policy and Practice in Scotland (TAPPS)	Launching in 2025-26
Language Accessibility Promise	Launching in 2025-26
New project to address the priority area Delivering Tailored, Targeted and Personalised Support	Open call launched in October 2025

Appendix 2: Project roles and responsibilities

Task	Responsibility
Setting up STEP Network events	QAA/CDN
Setting up additional team meetings	Project Lead
Signing contract	Project Lead and QAA
Attending meetings of Topic Leadership Group	Project Leads and Co-Leads
Attending in-person STEP Network meetings	Project team and QAA/CDN Key Contact
Supporting discussion at STEP Network meetings	QAA/CDN Key Contact
Recording project progress after STEP Network meetings	QAA/CDN Key Contact
Managing project budget	Project team
Ensuring that members of your project team are supported to come to the in-person meetings	Project team
Day-to-day project work	Project team
Queries and general support about project content	QAA/CDN Key Contact
Queries about student engagement and partnership in relation to projects	sparqs
Queries relating to in-person STEP Network meetings	QAA
Queries relating to Online Support Sessions	CDN
Queries relating to MS Teams general and project channels	CDN
Queries about contracts and finance	QAA
Submitting invoices	Project Lead and QAA
Submitting mid-year report	Project Lead and QAA
Submitting end-of-year report	Project Lead and QAA
Setting up project page on the STEP website	QAA
Providing guidance on web content	QAA/CDN
Generating content project page on the STEP website	Project team
Offering slots at NEON and SESN meetings for project teams to discuss their work	sparqs