



**STEP** Scotland's Tertiary  
Enhancement Programme

# STEP Overview

2024-25

## 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 How is STEP governed?**

### **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.

### 3.3 STEP Network

The STEP Network is the largest of three groups responsible for the governance of STEP. 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.

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](#).



### 3.4 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