

Understanding the staff development landscape required to support diverse learner journeys in the tertiary sector

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STEP

Scotland's Tertiary
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Executive Summary

This State of Play report provides a comprehensive overview of educator development across Scotland's tertiary sector, undertaken within the context of the Scottish Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP). It explores how educators (those who teach and / or support learning) are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to meet the needs of increasingly diverse learner journeys. The report situates these considerations within the national policy shift toward a more coherent tertiary education system and the ongoing professionalisation of teaching.

Drawing on demographic data, stakeholder perspectives, and sector literature, the report examines the concept of diverse learner journeys and the implications for educators' own learning and development. It analyses the critical influences shaping educator development, including national policy, institutional priorities, and evolving professional expectations, and it considers how educator development is operationalised across further, higher and tertiary education institutions. Through this lens, the report identifies common patterns, points of variation, and factors influencing educator development practice.

Emerging development needs, and how these needs are met, are explored through practice examples at individual, programme, departmental, and institutional levels. These examples illustrate how educator development can support innovation, inclusivity, and responsiveness to diverse learner needs. The report concludes by outlining implications for policy, practice, and future enhancement, and possible opportunities for collaboration and shared learning across the tertiary sector.

As set out in the methodology, the next phase of the project will involve stakeholder engagement through a consultation questionnaire distributed alongside the State of Play report. Data gathered via stakeholder engagement will be thematically analysed to inform the final findings report, supported by high impact case studies and a student co-created resource exploring perspectives on the future educator within the tertiary context.

Overall, the State of Play report contributes to sector understanding of educator development as a cornerstone of quality enhancement. It provides an evidence base to inform future strategic planning and highlights effective practice that supports both educator development and the success of diverse learners across Scotland's tertiary education landscape.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the project leadership team, project steering group and partners listed in Appendix 1 for their stewardship, contributions and expertise, all of which shaped the development of the State of Play report. Their insights and engagement were instrumental in shaping the analysis and findings presented.

1. Introduction

1.1 Why understanding educator development is important

To effectively support diverse learner journeys - the current Scottish Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP) theme - it is essential to consider how educators (those who teach and/or support learning) are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies required to succeed in their educational practice. It is through this lens that we have developed this report and consider key areas of strategic importance.

Recognising the increasingly diverse student and staff learner population across demographic, generational, educational, and structural dimensions is central to identifying and understanding educator development needs. At the same time, these considerations are situated within the national policy shift toward establishing a more coherent Scottish tertiary education sector - encompassing further and higher education and underpinned by shared governance and enhancement led quality assurance - and the ongoing professionalisation of teaching. It is both timely and essential, not simply to recognise the distinct systems, cultures, and processes that shape educator development in higher education (HE) and further education (FE) but to understand these development needs through a tertiary lens.

There has been a range of research exploring the learning and development needs of staff in FE and HE. The latest snapshot of professional development for educators in Scottish HE Institutions was undertaken in 2013, as part of a prior Enhancement Themes funded 2-year cross-HE sector project (Cannell and Gilmour, 2013). Meanwhile, the College Development Network (CDN) have undertaken analysis of learning needs, opportunities and provision via their Workforce Surveys, the latest undertaken in 2024 (Diffley Partnership, 2024).

However, evidence about how educator development is conceptualised, delivered and evaluated to adapt to changing student and staff learners across Scotland's tertiary system, or how the evolving national post-secondary education strategies are being translated into practice - remains fragmented. Furthermore, there has not yet been consideration of different perspectives from key stakeholders such as those in leadership, those who support and develop educators, or through the perspective of educators as learners themselves. Collectively, these gaps constrain strategic planning and resourcing of development, cross sector collaboration, and the sharing of effective approaches.

This collaborative STEP project aims to address these gaps. The project has been co-led by the Glasgow School of Art, City of Glasgow College and University of the West of Scotland and supported by staff and student partners who formed the Project Steering Group representing a range of colleges and universities. A full list of partners and the project activities is provided in appendix 1.

1.2 Project aims and research questions

This project has been developed to provide a comparison of needs and approaches across FE and HE institutions, to identify the challenges as we move towards a more unified tertiary sector in Scotland and the opportunities for learning and collaboration. The project seeks to support the tertiary sector in considering its approaches to educator development by identifying effective, high impact practices that support diverse learner journeys. The project findings can be utilised to inform institutional and sector-wide conversations about strategic investment and innovation in educator development.

As the first project output, this report provides a desk-based analysis of existing literature, policy and research on the approaches to educator development across the tertiary sector. As such, it provides a current 'state of play' for educator development in Scotland's tertiary education sector and will underpin subsequent stages of the project, including stakeholder engagement, and the identification and development of high-impact educator development case studies.

Specifically, the research questions that this report considers are:

1. What are the existing tertiary sector-wide strategies and priorities that inform staff development of those who teach and/or support diverse learners?
2. How are these articulated and/or operationalised at institution level?
3. Who are the key stakeholders in the design and delivery of staff development activities?
4. What are the development needs of those who teach and / or support diverse learners in the tertiary sector?
5. How do institutions evaluate the impact staff development activities? And what are the defining features (if any) of high impact practice?

The report is intended for academic and educational developer teams, senior leaders, policy makers in Scotland's tertiary education sector, as well as educators, student partners, and the wider tertiary education community.

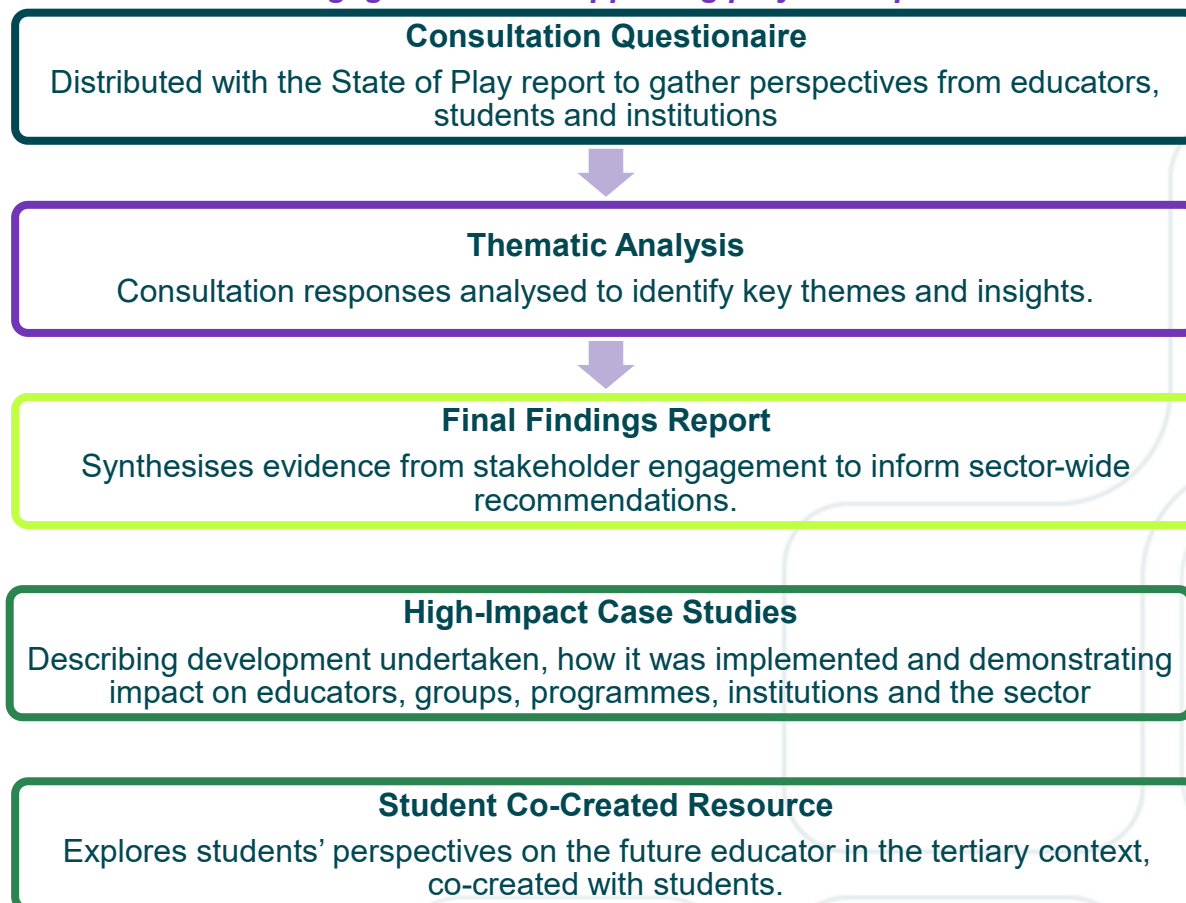
1.3 Methodology

The project combines a literature review followed by stakeholder engagement to generate a comprehensive understanding of educator development practices that support diverse learner journeys across Scotland's tertiary education sector. This report is premised on a literature review, involving a desk-based analysis of national reports, policy documents, and peer reviewed studies relating to educator development in tertiary education in Scotland and beyond. It also draws on insights and expertise shared from the STEP Staff Development Project Steering Group and wider STEP network (see appendix 1 for more detail).

The report will be used as a key vehicle to support strategic conversations about educator development with stakeholders including those in leadership, those who support and develop educators, and educators themselves recognising them as diverse learners, as detailed in figure 1. Through these engagements we aim to support strategic thinking and approaches, as well as to

determine if the report accurately reflects educator development in tertiary education, identify any major gaps, and gather opinions on the future direction of educator development. The final project report will be supported by a series of high impact case studies related to educator development to highlight effective and impactful education development practice and support innovation and strategic development. In addition, we aim to develop a resource exploring students' perspectives on the 'future educator' within the tertiary context.

Figure 1. Stakeholder engagement and supporting project outputs



1.4 Report structure

- Section 2 explores the concept of diverse learner journeys, drawing on demographic data and the literature to illustrate the varied pathways of students and educators.
- Section 3 analyses the principal influences shaping educator development, including national policy, institutional priorities, and evolving sector expectations.
- Section 4 examines how educator development is operationalised across further and higher education, identifying common patterns, variations, and influencing factors. Rather than a systematic audit of institutional practice in Scotland, it identifies common patterns, variations, and influencing factors, drawing on literature, sector reports, and STEP project insights.

- Section 5 builds on this analysis to outline emerging development needs and presents case studies that illustrate effective practice at multiple levels.
- Section 6 considers implications for policy, practice, and future enhancement across the tertiary sector, highlighting opportunities for collaboration and shared learning.

2. What do we mean by diverse learner journeys – A stakeholder analysis

This section explores what is meant by diverse learner journeys, drawing on demographic data and the literature to consider the multifaceted pathways students follow, into and through tertiary education. The section also considers the diverse learner journeys of educators and their diverse learning needs, a key lens within the STEP theme.

2.1 Student learners

2.1.1 Key demographic data

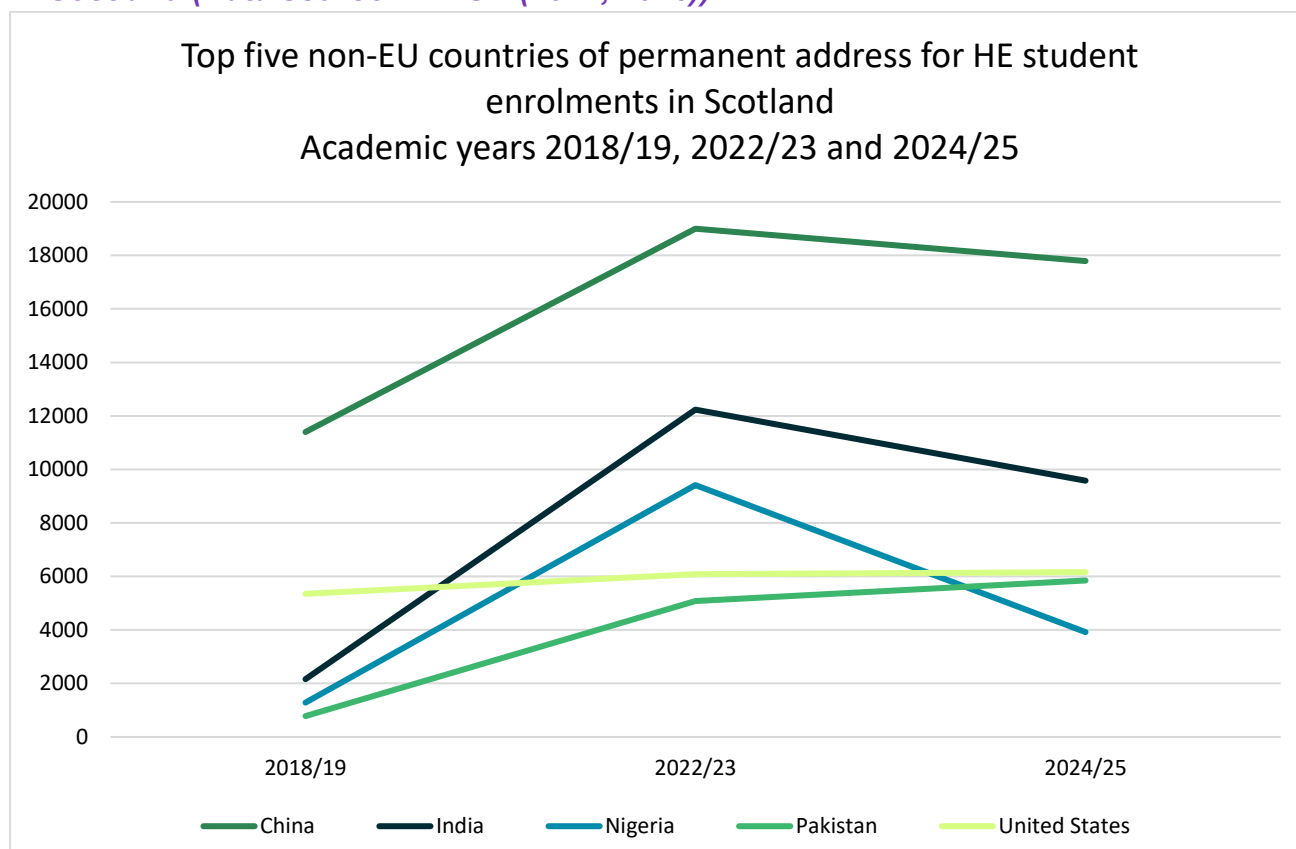
The tertiary student population is becoming increasingly diverse across multiple dimensions – as shown in table 1.

Table 1 – Summary of student demographic data

Category	Further Education (FE)	Higher Education (HE)	Notes / variation
Age (<22)	52% in 2023-24 Increase from 50% in 2014-15 (SFC, 2025a - Background table 7)	42% in 2024 Decrease from 55% in 2016. (ECU, 2018 - Table 1.1; Advance_HE, 2024b - Tab 1.1).	In HE, a corresponding increase in proportion of older students is noted.
Disability / Specific Learning Difficulty disclosure	26% (2023–24) Increase from 16% (2014) (SFC, 2025b - Background table 5)	17.4% (2022–23) Increase from 10% (2016) (ECU, 2018 - Table 2.1; Advance_HE, 2024b - Tab 1.1).	UK-wide disciplinary variation (HE): 7% in Business to 26% in Arts (Advance_HE, 2024b - Tab 2.2).
Ethnic minority / global majority students	14% (2023-24) Increase from 6.4% (2014) (SFC, 2025b - Background table 5).	11.7% (2023) Increase from 7.7% (2016) with a higher proportion in post-graduate programmes (ECU, 2018 - Table 3.1; Advance_HE, 2024b - Tab 1.1).	
Nationality	Students from outside Scotland 19% (2024) Decrease from 43% (2014)*.	Decrease in EU student population; growth in non-EU student population	*FE student nationality accessed via SFC data request (June 2026) - © Scottish Funding

Category	Further Education (FE)	Higher Education (HE)	Notes / variation
		(HESA, 2024, 2026) - also see Figure 2 below.	Council. These statistics are licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated.
Sex distribution	50% Female / 50% Male (SFC, 2025a - Background table 10)	57% Female / 43% Male (Advance_HE, 2024b - Tab 1.1).	UK-wide disciplinary variation (HE): 21% female students in engineering and technology to 82% psychology (Advance_HE, 2024b - Tab 2.2).
Students identifying as trans (2023–24)	2.5% (SFC, 2025b - Background table 5).	1.5% (SFC, 2025b - Background table 5).	Data collected from 2021-22.
Socio-demographic - % of students from most deprived SIMD	25% (HE in FE) (Kernonhan, 2025; SFC, 2025b - Figure 1a).	19% (2023-24) (Kernonhan, 2025; SFC, 2025b - Figure 1a).	

Figure 2. Top five non-EU countries of permanent address for HE student enrolments in Scotland (Data source – HESA (2024, 2026))



2.1.2 Diverse learner journeys

Learner journeys are similarly varied - encompassing multiple entry points, transitions, and destinations within and across the tertiary sector.

Qualifications in Scotland are benchmarked against the 12-point Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Levels 1 to 6 represent school and further education qualifications and levels 7 to 12 higher education levels. FE colleges typically support up to level 8 and HE institutions support level 7 to level 12. Colleges also deliver degree-level provision in partnership with awarding universities (Robertson and Cunningham, 2024). Diverse transition support requirements also arise from differing articulation pathways between FE and HE, such as advanced standing, advanced progression and progression without credit (Robertson and Cunningham, 2024). Lifelong learners, including migrants, returning learners, older adults and incarcerated learners, often fall outside mainstream provision and require tailored pathways (Ioannou, 2023).

Learner journeys are also shaped differently within urban and rural areas, with some institutions experiencing growing enrolment while others are impacted by outward migration (Claeys-Kulik, Ekman Jørgensen and Stöber, 2019) – an important consideration for institutions spread across large rural and island geographies such as in the Scottish Highlands (Baxter, Yuill and Holm, 2022).

In addition to the varied educational backgrounds and progression routes, the student population in Scotland's tertiary sector is shaped by a range of socio-economic factors. According to a recent Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) report (Wright, et al., 2025), many students UK-wide balance their studies with part-time or even full-time employment, often as a necessity due to the rising cost of living. Commuter students, who travel significant distances from home rather than living on campus, face challenges in terms of time management, access to resources, and social integration.

2.2 Staff learners

2.2.1 Key demographic data

As with students, there have also been changes in the diversity of the tertiary staff population – across different dimensions.

Overall, over the past ten years the number of full time equivalent (FTE) staff within FE in Scotland has decreased 9.9% (SFC, 2026b). This compares to an overall increase in FTE staff in HE of approximately 30% across the UK (nation specific figures are not provided) (AdvanceHE, 2024a). Table 2 provides a summary of demographic changes.

Table 2 - Summary of staff demographic data

Category	Further Education (FE)	Higher Education (HE)	Notes / variation
Disability / Specific Learning Difficulty disclosure	8% in 2024-25 (SFC, 2026b).	6% in 2023 (Advance_HE, 2024a - Table 2.1)	UK-wide disciplinary variation (HE): 11% arts to 3% hospitality management. Compares to the proportion in the Scottish population of 21% (Advance_HE, 2024a - Table 2.15)
Ethnic minority	3% in 2024-25 (SFC, 2026b) Increased from 2.6% in 2014.*	5.5% (UK) in 2024 Increase from 3.4% in 2016 37.7% (non-UK) Increase from 26.6% (ECU, 2017 - Table 3.1; Advance_HE, 2024a - Table 3.1)	UK / non-UK not available for FE. *FE staff ethnic minority % accessed via SFC data request (June 2026) - © Scottish Funding Council. These statistics are licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated.

Category	Further Education (FE)	Higher Education (HE)	Notes / variation
Sex distribution	53% female staff in 2024-25, with no notable change since 2015-16 (SFC, 2026b).	49% female staff in 2023 increased from 40% in 2003 (Advance_HE, 2024a - Table 4.2).	UK-wide disciplinary variation (HE): 17% female academics electrical, electronic and computing engineering to 75% allied health (Advance_HE, 2024a - Table 4.13).

2.2.2 Diverse educator journeys

Changes have also been observed in how educators begin and progress through their teaching careers.

In HE, more staff are now transitioning into teaching roles from professional practice, marking a departure from the traditional academic research to educator pathway (Cannell and Gilmour, 2013; Locke et al., 2016). Furthermore, teaching and research responsibilities have become more distinct, with less than half of academic staff holding combined teaching and research contracts (Advance_HE, 2024a). There has been a notable growth in teaching only posts, with a greater percentage of women in these posts (40% female, 32% male) compared to more men in combined teaching and research posts (47% male, 38% female) (Advance_HE, 2024a).

In contrast, FE educators have traditionally entered teaching as a vocation, although there is a growing emphasis on educational scholarship (McCune, 2018; Walker, 2026) and some people do enter as assessors (e.g. of apprenticeships) or instructors (e.g. for commercial short courses).

Across the tertiary sector, pressures and expectations differ greatly based on the type of institution and contract status, as well as between teaching and learning-support staff (Locke et al., 2016), for part-time as compared to full time staff (Cannell and Gilmour, 2013), for adult educators (Ioannou, 2023), and for postgraduates who teach (PGWT), who frequently encounter inconsistent support across different institutions (QAA Scotland, 2018).

Evolving career progression routes across FE and HE are explored further in section 4.3.

2.3 Implications for educators and educator development

Demographic diversification, increased cultural diversity arising from internationalisation, and students' prior educational experience all have implications for educators (Claeys-Kulik, Ekman Jørgensen and Stöber, 2019; Bossoni et al., 2024; Galvin, 2024; McVitty, 2025) – and so for educator development. Educators need to be equipped to respond to diverse learners and complex learner journeys. Specific examples include responding to integration and language challenges faced by large cohorts of international students within UK higher education (Ebel, 2024) and

challenges experienced by neurodivergent young people within an educational context (Tierney et al., 2026). Student learners' above noted socio-economic realities also have implications for curriculum design, the need for targeted support, and practices designed to promote equity and inclusion for all learners (Wright, et al., 2025).

According to the Changing Learner Report (Christie, 2024), which examines senior secondary students' transition to further education, the shift to digital learning during the pandemic increased digital literacy but exacerbated challenges in maintaining attention and engagement. Meanwhile, generational shifts have also been identified. Generation Z (born 1997 - 2012) are reported as expecting technology-integrated learning with a strong emphasis on inclusion and social justice. Generation Alpha (born since 2013) are reported as emerging as highly immersed in AI-enabled and digital learning environments (Bryant, no date). As a result, learners vary in their confidence and experience with online learning pose challenges for inclusive digital pedagogy (Beckingham, et al., 2022).

The intersection between diversification in learner and educator demographics is also important, as educator diversification does not mirror student diversity, particularly regarding internationalisation, affecting sense of belonging. Furthermore, a recent Scottish Funding Council (SFC) thematic review found that a sense of belonging is essential for positive outcomes and affects both staff and students in Scottish Colleges and Universities (SFC, 2026a). These trends highlight the need to recognise intersecting identities, lived experiences and systemic inequities - for both student and staff learners; further emphasising the connection between professional development and social justice, particularly for learners whose voices are marginalised in policy and practice (Ioannou, 2023).

Over a decade ago, research noted that that increasingly diverse academic career paths have intensified the need for more flexible, imaginative staff development opportunities across the tertiary sector (Locke et al., 2016) - supporting educator career development inclusive of hard-to-reach groups such as part-time colleagues, those not on full-time academic contracts, and Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) (Cannell and Gilmour, 2013). This remains a crucial priority. The development of educators should reflect the same diversity, adaptability, and responsiveness expected in teaching itself. This calls for careful consideration of how the sector offers development opportunities that not only meet educators' own learning needs but also deliver training in ways that are effective, supportive, and impactful in practice.

3. The evolving tertiary strategic context

In addition to recognising the increasingly diverse learner needs and journeys of educators and learners, it is essential to contextualise educator development within the broader strategic policy context. This section explores the critical influences shaping educator development across the tertiary sector, including the interplay between national policy, institutional priorities, and the evolving demands on educators.

3.1 The international policy context

Historically, the term “tertiary” has been used as a synonym to encompass the various post-compulsory education sectors. However, internationally and throughout the UK, social, economic and political pressures have underpinned a push towards a more coherent, and to varying degrees market-focused, tertiary education sector (Hazelkorn and Locke, 2023; Foster, Gannaway and Moore, 2024; Morris, 2024) – described as an ecosystem of governance, qualifications, and national coordination (Hazelkorn and Locke, 2023). Meanwhile, economic pressures have driven greater emphasis on vocational outcomes, industry collaboration and producing work-ready graduates (Ioannou, 2023; Foster, Gannaway and Moore, 2024).

The development of online, blended and hybrid teaching, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, resulted in significant changes to learning, teaching and assessment practices across the tertiary sector – further prompting digitally enhanced curriculum design and development (see for example Beckingham, *et al.*, 2022). Meanwhile, within the UK HE context specifically, other events such as Brexit, have influenced the internationalisation of UK education and reshaped universities’ approaches to global partnerships and their reliance on international student revenue (Foster, Gannaway and Moore, 2024).

Furthermore, historically in the HE sector, macro-level conditions separating teaching and research into distinct priorities have created tensions between these activities (Foster, Gannaway and Moore, 2024; O’Mahony, Gallivan and Dineen, 2025). These dynamics have also contributed to a hierarchy of prestige in relation to vocational, technical, and further education (Hazelkorn and Locke, 2023; Anderson and Bamber, 2024; Morris, 2024). This context is now juxtaposed with the increasing professionalisation of teaching and the evolving ambitions and practice associated with research-informed teaching.

In summary, the following critical tensions shape educator development across the tertiary sector, although the implications are better documented in relation to the HE sector than the FE sector (Foster, Gannaway and Moore, 2024; Galvin, 2024; McVitty, 2025):

- **Public good vs. private return on investment (ROI):** Increasingly, education is framed in economic terms, both at individual student and societal level, requiring a re-balancing between academic values, employability skills development and national industrial priorities

– as well as between assurance principles and enhancement principles that underpin learning and teaching.

- **Public trust vs. sector autonomy:** Growing political scrutiny and pressure to demonstrate value, alongside concerns about the impact of rising populism within student communities. Academic staff in UK universities are increasingly required to demonstrate excellence through system-level evaluations; such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) (Foster, Gannaway and Moore, 2024).
- **Teaching vs Research:** While historical divisions between teaching and research have created tensions and hierarchies of prestige that privilege research (and higher education) over vocational, technical, and further education (Hazelkorn and Locke, 2023; Anderson and Bamber, 2024; Morris, 2024), the trend towards the professionalisation of teaching signals a shift towards greater parity of esteem between research and educational practice.
- **Technological change vs. institutional capacity:** Rapid advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital tools are reshaping skill requirements, teaching practices, and delivery models, challenging institutions capacity to adapt curricula and pedagogy at pace.

3.2 The Scottish context

These tensions must be understood through the unique lens of Scottish tertiary education, which is recognised within the UK for its distinctive regulatory and quality enhancement frameworks and its integrated approach to funding – notably through a single national funding body, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Scotland’s resistance to the marketisation of tertiary education seen in England further underscores its commitment to education as a public good and maintaining enhancement-led quality assurance (Cannell and Gilmour, 2013; Morris, 2024).

However, while Scotland has been identified as one of the more progressive of the four UK nations, marketisation and financial pressures have increasingly been felt within the Scottish context (Morris, 2024; Bell, 2025). These pressures, alongside the historical prioritisation of higher education over vocational, technical, and further education, has hindered the realisation of a fully coherent tertiary ecosystem (Anderson and Bamber, 2024; Morris, 2024). It is in this context that the SFC 2021 review report, commissioned by the Scottish Government, set out the aspiration for a more coherent, responsive and sustainable tertiary education system - to make Scotland “the best place to be a student” and to meet current and future needs of learners and employers while contributing to Scotland’s wider social and economic priorities (SFC, 2020, 2021, 2025d).

Critical to enabling this coherent approach is the aspiration to create the right balance of pathways for learners whatever their ambitions and whatever their starting point. This requires the tertiary sector to promote parity of esteem, equity and choice across different learning pathways in and across FE and HE to create a truly tertiary sector (Brown and Varwell, 2024; O’Loan and Macfarlane, 2024; Robertson and Cunningham, 2024). It also requires educators to recognise the diversity of learners, and their starting points, ensuring they are supported to transition and succeed.

In 2024, to meet these aspirations, a single, unified quality assurance and enhancement framework for the tertiary sector was introduced - the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) (SFC, no date b, no date a). The TQEF aligns with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) (Claeys-Kulik, Ekman Jørgensen and Stöber, 2019; SFC, 2025d) and the UK Quality Code (QAA, 2024; SFC, 2025d) and sets out arrangements for quality and enhancement including effective practice in institution led self-evaluation. It also informs the sector enhancement approach through the Scottish Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP) - which replaced the previous HE-focused Enhancement Themes (QAA Scotland, 2022, 2024).

It should be noted that while SFC acts as Scotland's single national funding body, funding arrangements differ significantly between sectors; SFC funding makes up around 78% of funding for FE colleges but, in 2021-22, represented only 27% of income for universities (Robertson and Cunningham, 2024). The Tertiary Education and Training Funding and Governance (Scotland) Bill remains pending.

Other relevant developments include the drive to tackle persistent inequalities through the National Equality Outcomes (EHRC & SFC, 2023) as well as broader movements – such as the following:

- Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 (Bhambra, Nişancioğlu and Gebrial, 2020; Gopal, 2021) and arising Scottish Government anti-racism in education programme (Scottish_Government, no date),
- UK-wide Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) advice following the Abrahart legal case (EHRC, 2024) on an anticipatory duty to make reasonable adjustments, and
- the Emily Test campaign, which originating in Scotland aims to tackle gender based violence in education (EmilyTest, no date).

4. How educator development is operationalised across the Scottish tertiary sector

Building on the national strategic and policy landscape outlined in Section 3, this section examines how educator development is operationalised in practice across Scotland's FE, HE, and emerging tertiary contexts. It focuses on the institutional structures, stakeholders and development provisions for educators.

The analysis draws on the literature, sector reports, and insights shared through STEP project group (STEP Network Day 6 presentations: Calder, 2026; Gilmour, 2026; Hanesworth, 2026). It does not provide a systematic audit of institutional practice in Scotland. Rather, its purpose is to identify common patterns, points of variation, and factors that influence educator development within a tertiary sector characterised by longstanding sectoral differences as well as growing expectations of alignment.

4.1 Factors shaping institutional educator development aspirations

Educator development is increasingly positioned within institutional strategies and quality frameworks (Fitzpatrick and Zhang, 2026). A European University Association (EUA) survey of 163 HEIs, undertaken in 2025, indicates that the majority of European HE institutions now have formal learning and teaching strategies, many of which explicitly reference educator development as a driver of educational quality (Zhang, 2025)¹. This educational strategic focus is increasingly reflected through more structured support mechanisms, such as through greater integration of teaching into staff development structures, protected time and recognition for teaching-related activity, promotion criteria and systems, teaching and learning awards and funding for and engagement in scholarly activities and pedagogical research (Foster, Gannaway and Moore, 2024; O'Mahony, Gallivan and Dineen, 2025; Zhang, 2025; Fitzpatrick and Zhang, 2026).

This strategic emphasis is reflected across the Scottish tertiary sector, through the alignment of educator development with enhancement-led approaches embedded in STEP and TQEF. Feedback via the STEP Staff Development Project Steering Group identified that individual universities and colleges set out their own strategic ambitions, plans and objectives, which shape the operationalisation of educator development. However, there is diversity across both FE and HE institutions as to how each institution articulate these ambitions – variously through specific strategy documents, policies, career development frameworks and supporting guidance and or

¹ It should be noted the European University Association research focused on higher education – similar survey across further and or adult education has not been identified.

threaded through other institution wide strategies such as people and or equality, diversity and inclusion strategies.

Drawing on input from STEP project partners and the literature, several key structural factors differ across FE and HE and so impact educator development ambitions and practice, including:

- Approaches to teaching professionalisation and related sector regulatory requirements - such as General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges in the FE context (CDN, 2023) and the Advance HE Fellowships and Professional Standards Framework (PSF) in the HE context (Advance_HE, 2023) – explored further in section 4.3;
- Qualification frameworks and awarding powers - While HE institutions in Scotland have direct degree awarding powers, FE colleges deliver qualifications maintained by accrediting bodies, such as the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA), professional bodies and universities (Robertson and Cunningham, 2024). Thereby, resulting in different accountability pressures with colleges predominantly operating within externally defined qualification frameworks, while universities have greater flexibility to design curricula.
- Various articulation pathways across FE–HE boundaries further complicate alignment (Robertson and Cunningham, 2024).

Further cited structural differences include class sizes, assessment practices (continuous, practice-based assessment in FE versus greater emphasis on academic skills in HE) (Robertson and Cunningham, 2024). Similarly, the scale, disciplinary focus, campus geography, and institutional mission differentially shape approaches to educator development. However, such factors result in variation within sectors and even between campuses of the same institution, making commonalities and differences across the sectors difficult to define.

4.2 Key stakeholders in the design and delivery of educator development activities

4.2.1 Institutional actors

Across the tertiary sector, responsibility for educator development is typically shared across academic and educational developer teams alongside teams such as Human Resources, who tend to be responsible for induction, appraisal, leadership programmes, and workforce planning. In HE, academic development or educational development units commonly lead provision related to teaching qualifications, pedagogical innovation, and enhancement activity. In FE, responsibility is similarly structured but with greater input from sector bodies such as the College Development Network (CDN). While some institutions, especially small institutions within both FE and HE, do not have designated teams, educator development is delivered by a dedicated person(s).

Line managers, programme leaders, and heads of department act as key gatekeepers to participation by influencing workload allocation, priority setting, and access to development opportunities. The literature suggests that managerial recognition of teaching related development

is a critical enabler of staff engagement, while its absence constitutes a persistent barrier (Fitzpatrick and Zhang, 2026) – this might be reflected through institutional leadership as well as more localised leadership within departments and disciplines.

Finally, individual educators themselves are key actors in the design and delivery of educator development – through engagement and self-led development.

4.2.2 Students as partners

Students increasingly play an active role in shaping educator development and enhancement activity. This can include provision of development activities in response to student feedback, engagement and consultation work, as well as being more proactive provision driven through partnership activities with students such as enhancement projects or policy developments.

For example, studies have shown the benefits of curriculum co-creation, having value both in responding to students' input and promoting educator development (Bovill, 2023; Santos, Ieda et al., 2024). Meaningful integration of student voice in educator development requires intentional structures, feedback loops, and staff confidence to act on student input and is therefore a key area of development for educators.

The revised Student Learning Experience (SLE) model, developed by sparqs and which applies across FE, HE and tertiary institutions, supports partnership through meaningful dialogue, a shared understanding of learning quality, and structured prompts for use of student feedback within educator development spaces at subject, faculty, institutional and even sector level (sparqs, 2023; Brown and Varwell, 2024). Institutional quality assurance processes such as annual monitoring, periodic review and external quality reviews all act as spaces within which students have input and so can shape educator development.

Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership (the "Partnership Ambition") also articulates a holistic vision for student partnership across the Scottish tertiary sector, providing a key sector reference point for institutions when evidencing their partnership work (sparqs, 2024). The Partnership Ambition explicitly articulates staff training and professional development as a key feature of effective student partnership and provides a tool for exploring ways to strengthen partnership.

Evidence suggests that students often have a clear sense of what matters to them in learning and teaching yet hold more mixed or uncertain views of what a coherent tertiary system entails (Bossoni et al., 2024) – and so what the future teacher looks like within the tertiary sector specifically remains an area of interest and importance for considering future development needs and approaches.

4.2.3 External and sector bodies

As noted above, educator development in Scotland is strongly shaped by national and sector bodies. These include the CDN, GTCS, Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAA Scotland), Advance HE, awarding bodies, and professional statutory and regulatory organisations with accreditation or approval roles. Such bodies provide professional standards, frameworks, programmes, and developmental resources that contribute to coherence while providing additional layers of

expectation and accountability. Sector bodies also provide regular development events and programmes for educators and those in professional service roles, as well as those who support educator development.

Processes, such as Self-Evaluation Action Plans (SEAPs) managed by SFC (2025c), apply across the tertiary sector. Meanwhile, other sector agencies have differing and sector specific relationships. Partnership between Advance HE and HE institutions is membership-driven; focus on professional teaching standards falls within a broader and global remit in which universities pay fees to access services, data, fellowships and equality charters. In contrast, the CDN, which is nationally funded, acts exclusively as the sector development agency for Scotland's colleges and vocational learning and its services are integrated into the Scottish college system and dedicated to workforce development. Historically, services have included sector workforce surveys that help shape staff development (CDN, 2023).

4.3 Operationalising educator development aspirations

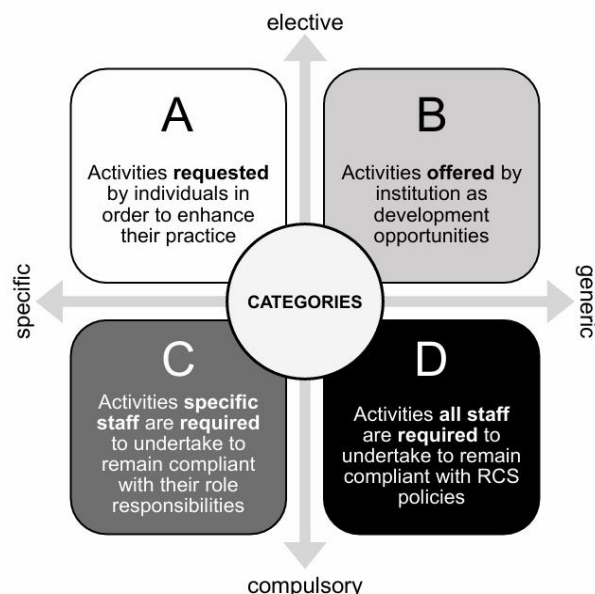
Understanding operational delivery of educator development has been strongly informed by the experience and expertise of STEP Staff Development Project Steering Group who themselves hold institutional roles for educator development. Project Steering Group insight suggests that, across FE, HE and tertiary institutions, operationalisation of institutional educator development “strategies” differentiate between “compulsory” development activities, such as induction and formal qualifications, and “elective” individual development needs. Development activities also vary between generic to discipline specific. These dimensions are reflected in the exemplar matrix (figure 3) which categorises professional development along the axis - specific to generic – and elective to compulsory. Annual staff appraisals or Professional Development Reviews (PDRs) serve to gather insights as to staff development needs across an institution as well as to agree any required budget, as normally required for “elective” development.

Educator development is also provided for programme teams, rather than individuals, typically focusing on curriculum design and development at programme or module level. Within the HE context, examples include support provided ahead of the initial validation of new degree programmes or revalidation of existing programmes.

Since 2020 and in the post-Covid period, staff development for curriculum development has embedded designing for flexible, blended and hybrid delivery (see for example Beckingham, *et al.*, 2022). Relatedly, as delivery models continue to diversify, such as through collaborative provision and transnational education, there is also a growing need for staff development that supports coherent curriculum development for partnership activity and varied delivery models.

Figure 3 - Exemplar categories of professional development provided by Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Categories of
Professional Update



4.3.1 Formal, compulsory and accredited provision

Compulsory educator development provisions include onboarding, inductions, staff development days, workshops and team events or specific training designed to address new guidelines and provisions for formal and accredited teaching qualifications.

The literature notes that, while only 31% of HEIs across the wider European Higher Education Area have adopted structured professional frameworks, the UK and Ireland HE sectors stand out for their widespread use of competence-based professional development frameworks (Zhang, 2025) - such as the PSF in the UK (Advance_HE, 2023) and Ireland's national framework (HEA/T&L, no date). A similar approach is evident in the Scottish FE sector with the Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges (GTC Scotland, 2021).

In Scotland, professional development frameworks and associated teaching qualifications - the Teaching Qualification in Further Education (TQFE) (SCQF levels 9 and 11) in FE and Postgraduate Certificates in Learning and Teaching or Academic Practice (PGCerts or PGCAP) (SCQF level 11) in HE - are key mechanisms professionalising teaching, providing structured and credit bearing awards for developing the pedagogical knowledge, skills, and values required for high-quality learning and teaching.

Positioned at the intersection of institutional quality assurance and individual professional growth, TQFEs and PGCerts establish a baseline of pedagogical competence for the Scottish tertiary education workforce that is drawn from diverse disciplinary, vocational, and professional backgrounds. Consistency in teaching practice across the FE sector is supported through

qualification programme alignment with the GTCS Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges (GTC Scotland, 2021). Similarly, most, though not all, HE institutions' qualification programmes are externally accredited to the PSF (Advance_HE, 2023). This includes experiential professional recognition routes with the PSF providing non-credit bearing routes for educators to have their practice recognised as effective and inclusive.

However, despite these shared underpinning principles, FE and HE teaching qualification routes and professional registration requirements vary (Walker, 2024; Robertson, 2026).

National bargaining serves as essential context in Scotland's FE Sector, whereby salaries and employment terms are agreed at a national level (EIS, 2025). Under the 2017 national agreement, all college lecturers must register professionally, as part of their terms and conditions (EIS, 2018, 2025), which involves registration with GTCS and engagement with the Professional Standards for Lecturers, typically through the TQFE or equivalent experience (Scottish_Government, 2025c, 2025b). TQFE accreditation follows national guidance and requires alignment with professional standards, including specific entry criteria, 120 hours of teaching practice, and provision of one full day without class contact during study (EIS, 2018; Scottish_Government, 2025b, 2025c).

In contrast, in the HE sector (in Scotland and the UK more broadly) professional qualifications and Advance HE fellowship requirements are less uniform and determined by individual institutions. Indeed, it has been debated whether greater regulation would be at odds with academic freedom within the HE context (Finn, 2020; Macfarlane, 2024).

Recent mapping of the FE and HE professional standards (GTCS and PSF respectively) shows close alignment in requirements, however, navigating these standards in practice is complex, particularly for staff working across FE and HE (Walker, 2024). For example, the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) operate within a federated tertiary institution framework – with registration requirements determined by individual academic partner governance structures. The result is that staff navigate both FE and HE professional standards, sometimes pursuing dual recognition through GTCS registration and Advance HE Fellowships by evidencing their practice against two aligned but separately framed standards (Walker, 2024). In contrast, at the Scotland's Rural University College (SRUC), which is also a tertiary institution, staff who teach across both FE and HE are not required to do both qualifications because institutional governance arrangements mean that staff are not bound by national bargaining requirements or, therefore, GTCS registration (Hanesworth, 2026).

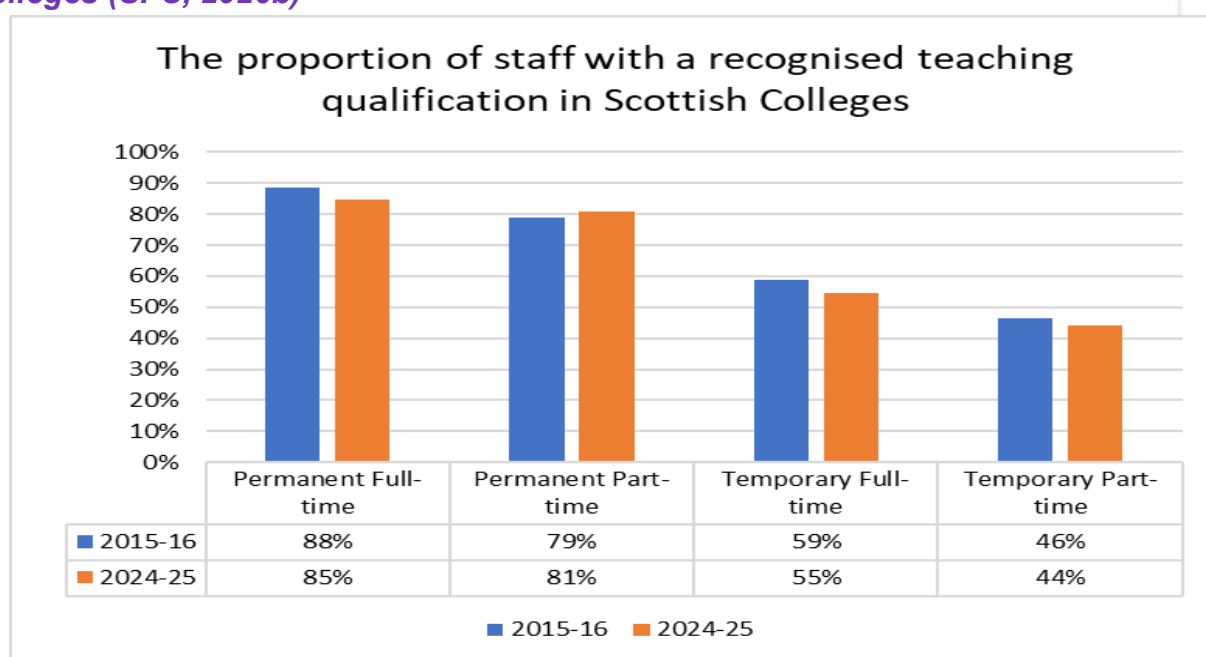
In the context of the Scottish government aspirations for a more coherent tertiary sector, these contrasts - between the FE mandatory requirements and the more discretionary approaches in HE - have implications that require consideration (Robertson, 2026).

Access to accredited provision has also been noted as uneven with evidence of inconsistency across both FE and HE professional development provision for part-time staff, hourly paid colleagues, and those in teaching-support roles, and barriers related to workload, funding, eligibility and capacity issues for TQFE qualification providers (Scottish_Government, 2025b; Robertson, 2026). Research on postgraduates who teach (PGWT) highlights inconsistent institutional policies, variable access to

training, and uneven inclusion in accreditation pathways (QAA Scotland, 2018). At European level, though it is unclear for Scotland, non-academic teaching support staff, who may carry substantial teaching workloads (up to 50% at 60% of HEIs), are rarely required to undertake formal development (only 20% of European HEIs) (Zhang, 2025).

As a result, teaching qualifications can simultaneously professionalise practice and reproduce structural inequalities. Overall, approximately 60% of HE academics in England, Wales and Northern Ireland² hold a teaching qualification (or have been recognised in other ways for their teaching expertise) in 2024/25 (HESA, no date). This compares to approximately 80% of permanent and 50% of temporary FE staff in Scotland (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – The proportion of staff with a recognised teaching qualification in Scottish Colleges (SFC, 2026b)



4.3.2 Elective, relational and practice-based learning

Alongside formal provision, informal, dialogical and relational forms of educator development play a critical role – as reflected in the literature, pedagogical collaboration, through peer reviews and communities of practice, provides valued development (O’Mahony, Gallivan and Dineen, 2025; Smith and Wyness, 2025). In Scotland, connection and collaboration, facilitated through peer learning, mentoring, committees of practice, professional dialogue and reflective spaces, are highly valued across both HE and FE (Cannell and Gilmour, 2013; CDN, 2022).

Based on insights from STEP project partners, informal educator development across HE and FE includes activities such as career mentoring, peer observation, activities relating to curriculum

² It is optional for Scottish providers to return data for the HESA academic teaching qualification field, whereas it is mandatory for other UK nations. Due to only a small amount of Scottish data being returned for this field, this data is not published.

review and curriculum development, and outcomes from institutional and local level enhancement projects and initiatives. These can also include initiatives led by curriculum leads or programme leaders who directly support staff within departments.

4.3.3 Career progression routes

Career progression routes are evolving across FE and HE. Within FE, academic leadership levels are nationally defined – progressing from responsibility for a specific curriculum area (level 1) to leading significant, diverse or interdisciplinary areas (level 3) (EIS, 2017). Pay bands are implemented locally by colleges, and progression opportunities typically arise as positions become available rather than via a defined academic career pathway. In contrast, academic career pathways in HE are more clearly defined. Furthermore, while historically academic career tracks have been research focused, increasingly, institutions are developing teaching- and scholarship-focused career tracks to recognise the contributions in these areas – though implementation remains challenging (Smith and Walker, 2024; Lucas, 2025).

4.4 Enablers and constraints shaping educator development practice

4.4.1 Enablers

Key enablers of effective educator development include enhancement-led institutional cultures, protected time, recognition through promotion and reward systems, collegial networks, and reflective spaces. In summary, the literature suggests that environments where both formal and informal educator development is valued, as integral to educational quality rather than ancillary to core business, engagement is stronger and more sustained (O'Mahony, Gallivan and Dineen, 2025; Fitzpatrick and Zhang, 2026).

4.4.2 Constraints

However, the extent to which strategic intentions translate into meaningful and sustained educator development varies within both FE and HE. The above mentioned EUA research programme highlights that inconsistent prioritisation of teaching, fluctuating resourcing, and uneven recognition continue to constrain the integration of educator development within institutional planning and decision-making (O'Mahony, Gallivan and Dineen, 2025; Fitzpatrick and Zhang, 2026) – suggesting that where alignment is weak, educator development risks becoming fragmented, compliance-driven, or vulnerable to short-term budget pressures. In the European context, tensions are also noted between institutional top-down compliance driven development priorities and bottom-up individual needs driven or voluntary development, also described as emancipatory and encompassing critical reflection (O'Mahony, Gallivan and Dineen, 2025).

Similarly, inconsistent prioritisation of teaching and fluctuating resources are reported in the Scottish tertiary context that signal persistent structural and cultural barriers – as well as tensions between top-down and bottom-up drivers.

Within HE, education-focused staff often cite workload constraints arising from non-teaching responsibilities and commonly express frustration concerning capacity for professional growth, career pathways and prospects for advancement (Cannell and Gilmour, 2013; Foster, Gannaway and Moore, 2024).

Similarly, within FE, lack of time and insufficient support for engaging in training, innovation, and good-practice development have been reported (Diffley Partnership, 2024). Inconsistent recognition and reward practices are also reported within FE; longer-serving lecturers face pressures and costs to obtain qualifications for GTCS registration and to meet contractual obligations, which has been described as unfair (CDN, 2022). Meanwhile, the high cost of TQFE fees and class cover - raise concerns about how colleges can sustainably meet mandatory qualification requirements as professional learning budgets continue to shrink (CDN, 2023).

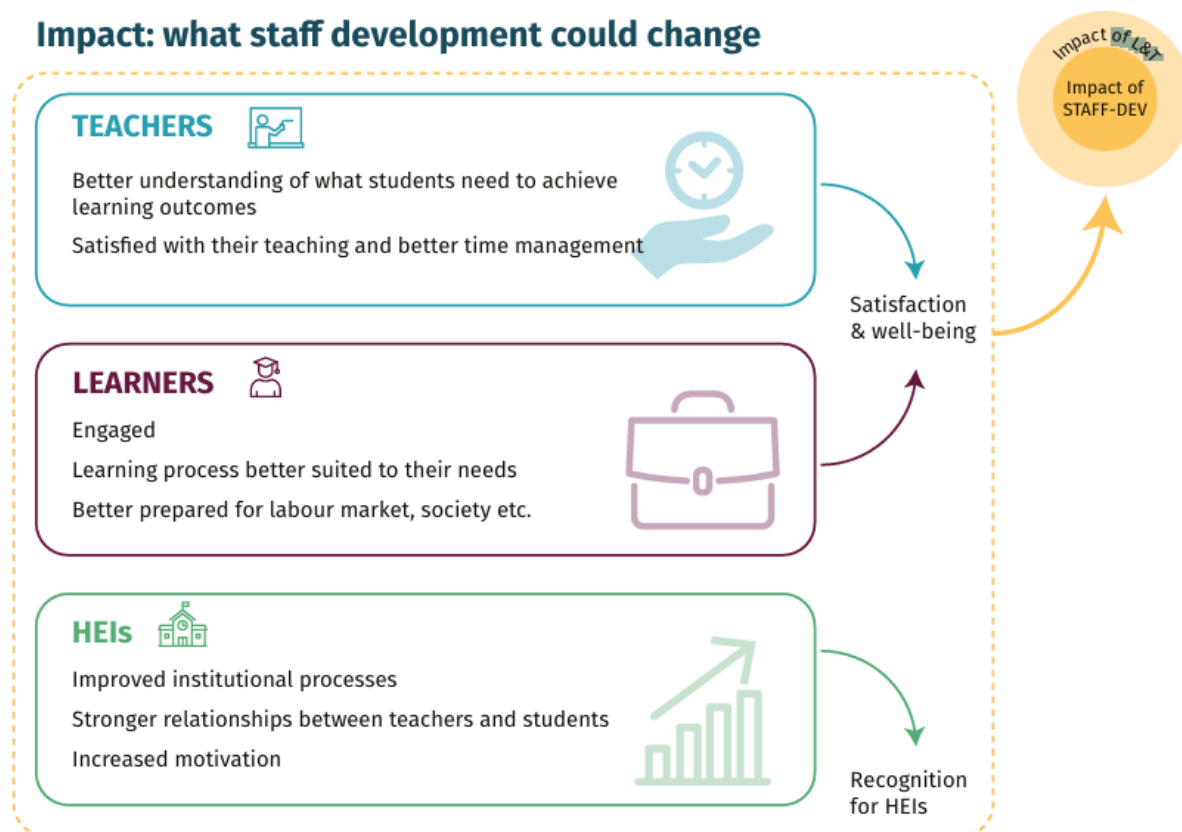
4.5 Evaluation and impact of educator development activities

4.5.1 How impact is described in the literature

Educator development is integral to the quality of learning and student experience. However, the multitude of factors influencing teaching and learning practices makes it challenging to isolate and measure the specific impact of educator development initiatives. Furthermore, enhancement-led initiatives and market-driven policies, discussed in section 3, influence how impact is conceptualised. The growing emphasis on return on investment, alongside ongoing tensions between research-led and teaching excellence agendas, continues to shape staff recognition, professional development, and career progression (Foster, Gannaway and Moore, 2024; Zhang, 2025). Meanwhile, there are calls to broaden evaluation of educator development to encompass what individuals themselves value (Smith and Wyness, 2025).

Therefore, evaluating the impact of educator development is complex. It is argued that a holistic approach to educator development includes systematic evaluation as well as recognition of pedagogical innovation (Fitzpatrick and Zhang, 2026); and that impact should be assessed in terms of both processes and longitudinal outcomes (Fitzpatrick and Zhang, 2026).

Figure 5 - Impact: what staff development could change from Fitzpatrick and Zhang (2026)



Effectiveness of educator development can be assessed at the following levels, as visualised in figure 5 (Fitzpatrick and Zhang, 2026):

- students (impact on their learning),
- staff (career progression, professional development including building teacher confidence and resilience),
- and institutions (enhancing the learning and teaching culture, the quality of education provision and relevance of study programmes).

In the European context (Zhang, 2025), the core set of indicators institutions use to evaluate the impact of educator development include:

- student satisfaction data (the most cited),
- the number of teaching qualifications (the number of teachers with postgraduate certificates, Master's, etc.),
- the number of teaching fellowships (with Advance HE fellowships cited by UK HEIs),
- staff feedback (from deans or other line managers),
- scholarly and pedagogical activity,
- professional recognition and the number of staff mobilities,
- participation in development opportunities, teaching innovations, awards, and
- wider student outcome metrics.

The QAA Cymru case studies (QAA Cymru, 2024) illustrate approaches to evidencing impact in the tertiary context, demonstrating how professional development initiatives shape teachers' professional identity, enhance practice and confidence and improve student learning. Impact is captured through a range of methods, including qualitative feedback as well as quantitative data such as retention and attainment.

Key themes in the literature on how educator professional qualifications should be evaluated focus on whether impact should be measured by immediate outcomes, like programme completion, or by longer-term effects. Evaluations of accredited programmes conducted at or shortly after completion primarily address early career academics; however, this approach overlooks longitudinal impacts and it is argued, therefore, that evaluation should extend to beyond the early career stage (Davis, Carole and Antony, Aleksiev, 2020). At a sector level, the correlation between fellowship uptake and institutional metrics has been debated. For example, van der Sluis (2023) argues that professional recognition – such as through fellowships - has minimal direct correlation with teaching quality. However, given the multitude of factors influencing teaching and learning practices, a case has been made for more nuanced evaluation encompassing how teaching qualifications and fellowships affect individuals, practice, and community (Kushnir and Spowart, 2021; Cathcart et al., 2023). The positive impact of professional recognition has also been demonstrated in raising the profile of learning and teaching, providing a career progression framework for education-focused staff, and influencing institutional strategies and policies related to learning and teaching (Spowart, Turner and Dismore, 2020).

A recent EUA (Fitzpatrick and Zhang, 2026) study highlights students' call for a shift from transmission-based, teacher-centric evaluation models toward more student-centred, dialogic approaches informed by contemporary pedagogy. The study also underscores the importance of transparent feedback processes, in which student input is visibly valued and acted upon, supported by an institutional culture that empowers staff to respond meaningfully to student contributions (Fitzpatrick and Zhang, 2026).

4.5.2 Evaluation practices in Scotland

Drawing on input from the STEP Staff Development Project Steering Group (Calder, 2026; Gilmour, 2026; Hanesworth, 2026) and sector reports (such as CDN, 2023), evaluation of educator development includes the following mechanisms:

- **Institutional measures** – as embedded within KPIs, embedded within quality assurance processes (such as strategic dialogue meetings, AMRs, Quality Reviews)
- **Sector reporting** to SFC and HESA including demographics and professional qualification rates (though the latter is not mandatory for HE). Equality mainstreaming reporting also require reflection on differential outcomes for specific groups (EHRC & SFC, 2023).
- **Sector professional development reporting** – CPD impact logs as required by GTCS within FE and annual Advance HE Continual Professional Development (CPD) report within HE.
- **Short-term / immediate reflections** following sessions or activities is commonly collected with a focus on participants' perceptions on it's usefulness.

- **Longer-term reflections** via staff and student surveys.
- **Staff promotion and fellowship metrics**

However, difficulties are reported in terms of gathering longer-term information about the actual impact of learning – across both the FE (CDN, 2023) and HE (Wright, Kaldor and Tran, 2025) sectors.

5. Emerging educator development needs and example approaches

Building on the previous sections, this section examines emerging development needs of those who teach and / or support diverse learners in the tertiary sector - drawing on the literature, such as the latest CDN staff development survey (Diffley Partnership, 2024) – and presents case studies that offer perspectives on various approaches to meeting these needs. These approaches address multiple levels - including individual, programme, departmental, and institutional - and encompass different areas of focus, such as trauma-informed methodologies and reflective practice.

5.1 Getting the basics right: teaching qualifications

There is a recognised need to provide foundational teaching qualifications while equipping educators to respond to emerging challenges and remain stay future orientated.

As noted in the previous section, institutional approaches to educator development typically include onboarding, inductions, staff development days, workshops and team events. Recent innovative examples from the FE sector (CDN, 2023) include:

- Glasgow Clyde College's 12-Week New Lecturer Programme, designed to increase confidence in teaching;
- UHI Moray College's Blue Sky Days, which create dedicated 'thinking space' for staff
- Fife College's life-coaching initiative, offering tailored support for specialist and academic roles.

The following further examples illustrate approaches that balance foundational teaching qualifications with innovation – embedding reflective practice, inclusive education principles and structured blended delivery.

Example 1 (FE) – At sector level, positive impacts described on completing a teaching qualification (CDN, 2022):

- Growth in the theory and practice around teaching;
- Greater understanding of the needs of learners;
- Better lesson planning;
- Increased confidence to teach well and decreased instances of imposter syndrome;
- Refreshed and/or developed writing and critical thinking skills;
- Greater confidence working with software for online delivery;

Example 2 (HE) - Programme review of Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) PgCAP (Kennedy, Cunningham and Galvin, 2023)

In 2022, GCU's PgCAP underwent a review to enhance its effectiveness as a master's level programme for staff new to teaching or supporting learning in HE. The review established two distinct pathways - PgCAP and PEC - to better support colleagues in teaching and wider student support roles (learning technologists, academic librarians, student disability team, and Student Association full time officers) respectively, and to improve monitoring of progression and achievement.

Enhancements focused on embedding inclusive and equitable education, widening participation, and integrating Universal Design for Learning principles. The redesign incorporated sustainability goals, including sustainability resources and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) self-evaluation tools. Delivery shifted to a deliberately structured blended model informed by the "Flexible Design at GCU" project, combining on-campus, synchronous online, and asynchronous learning through the Active Digital Design (ADD) framework. Assessment was strengthened by requiring participants to contextualise learning within their work roles, and peer-observation processes were expanded to deepen reflective practice.

Example 3 (FE) - Reflection on use of playfulness (being animated by curiosity, creativity and human flourishing) (Short, 2025).

Author makes the case that teaching in FE requires that educators embody both the technician and the tinkerer - that the art of good teaching requires a balance between "knowing when to follow the blueprint, and when to play with the design". They also highlight tension between the managerial language of marketization, outcomes, metrics, and performance, and the more humanistic aspirations of transformative, relational, innovative, and student-centred education.

5.2 Student engagement and partnership

Scotland's **Partnership Ambition** (sparqs, 2024) underscores the importance of staff training and professional development as a cornerstone of effective student partnership. It provides a practical framework for exploring and strengthening partnership practice across the tertiary sector, emphasising collaboration, inclusivity, and shared responsibility for learning enhancement.

The revised **Student Learning Experience (SLE)** engagement model (sparqs, 2023; Brown and Varwell, 2024), together with the **Academic Development Toolkit** (Bell, 2026), offers opportunities for deeper and more practical connections between student engagement and professional learning. These tools support academics in embedding partnership principles within their individual practice and aligning them with the **PSF**, annual performance reviews, and other formal professional development processes.

Example 4 (Tertiary) - The sparqs Academic Development Toolkit (Bell, 2026) is an online staff development toolkit, launched in March 2026, which comprises activities and resources which designed to raise 'awareness of' and 'engagement with' student partnership and its role within

Scotland's TQEF. The toolkit is intended to support Scottish tertiary institutions with embedding these concepts into new or existing induction and academic development activities for a range of colleagues with student-facing roles.

Example 5 (FE) - Reflective practice on use of peer assessment (Campbell, 2025)

The article reflects that learner challenges, e.g. socio-economic background and low level of prior academic achievement, make traditional teaching methods less effective. They suggest alternative approaches drawing on community of practice and active learning theory, which centres on student participation, creativity, engagement, and learning as social participation. Evaluation of peer assessment evidenced contribution to deeper learning, increased confidence, and enhanced student engagement

5.3 Inclusion, Sustainability and Wellbeing

While inclusive practices such as Universal Design and student-centred learning are well recognised, there is a lack of consistent knowledge, practice-based models, resources, and guidance needed to implement them, which increases workload and complicates adoption (Korthals Altes et al., 2024). In the Scotland FE context, staff seek further development in areas such as mental health, neurodivergence, gender identity, refugee support and adapting to a post-pandemic student population with evidence suggesting that varying levels of confidence in mandatory engagement with EDI and sustainability training insufficient (Diffley Partnership, 2024).

As well as gaps in skills and confidence, some staff are concerned about the potential for students to react negatively to inclusive teaching practices (Korthals Altes et al., 2024). (See also attitudes towards gender equality report (Ipsos, 2026).

How inclusion is defined affects educators' approach to inclusive teaching. Inclusion has often been understood in relation to particular groups - such as those with disabilities (Atanasova and Papen, 2026) - or viewed from a deficit perspective, focusing on students with specific needs. This contrasts with social models that emphasize the shortcomings of the education system and seek to remove barriers for previously underserved students (Blankman, 2024; Korthals Altes et al., 2024) – as for example through structured approaches such as Universal Design or implementation of digital accessibility regulations (2020) (Galvin, 2024).

Increase emphasis on the relational aspect of student experience – whether in relation to their lecturers, their peers or within the broader institutional support systems (Bossoni et al., 2024) – is evidenced through trauma informed practice (e.g. *Becoming Trauma-Informed: A Heuristic Inquiry into the Transformative Impact of Trauma-Informed Practice on a Further Education Lecturer in Scotland* (Rigliaco, 2025)). Decolonising approaches are also inherently relational and emphasize power dynamics (Quinlan and Thomas, 2025).

Wellbeing is also a critical issue (Student_Minds_Hub, no date), yet many staff, regardless of their role, find themselves responding to mental health concerns under-prepared, unsupported, and unclear about their boundaries and responsibilities. Generic mental health training is frequently viewed as insufficient. Furthermore, concerns exist that additional training may lead to increased responsibility and anxiety about making mistakes. Effective educator development requires ongoing, role-specific training complemented by institutional resources and clear processes for responding to mental health issues; supported by a broader structure to help them maintain appropriate boundaries and confidence. Academic teaching staff can also be supported to develop their understanding of the relationship between teaching, assessment and wellbeing (Student_Minds_Hub, no date).

Example 6 (Tertiary) - Scotland's anti-racism commitment - Guidance has been developed as part of the Anti-Racism in Education Programme (AREP) (Scottish_Government, 2025a, no date) and to support for tertiary colleagues to systematically embed race equality in curricula throughout Scottish FE and HE (Advance_HE, 2021).

Example 7a (HE) - The Culturally Sensitive Curricula Scales (CSCS) and the Culturally Sensitive Curricula (CSC) Educator Self-Reflection Tool (Quinlan and Thomas, 2025) has been developed, through collaboration blending equality, diversity, and inclusion expertise (second author) with academic development expertise (first author) and in response to the identified need for practical tools to facilitate inclusive curricular transformation in higher education. The tool, designed to promote academics' sense of agency, can be used to gather students' perceptions and enable reflective practice across six dimensions (Diversity Represented, Negative Portrayals, Positive Depictions, Challenge Power, Inclusive Classroom Interactions, and Culturally Sensitive Assessments). Use examples are provided.

Example 7b (HE) – The Internationally Relevant Curriculum Scales (IRCS) builds on the work of Quinlan and Thomas (2025) and offers a structured framework for evaluating the international relevance and cultural inclusivity of curricula. Developed at the University of Glasgow, the tool helps educators assess student perceptions and guide curriculum revisions to improve engagement and reduce attainment gaps for international and racially minoritised students.

Example 8 (FE) – A Scotland-based further education lecturer's reflective article on trauma-informed pedagogy (Rigliaco, 2025) - with reference to the CDN Trauma-Informed College Programme. They argue that for trauma informed practice to be truly effective, educators require ongoing support, including targeted training, opportunities for reflection, and recognition of the emotional labour inherent in their work. They also reflect that trauma-informed practice sometimes collides with policy-driven, performance-focused culture of FE.

Example 9 (FE) – On how teaching practice can challenge heteronormative norms through queer pedagogy (McIntyre, 2025), by challenging assumptions, embrace complexity and centre

student experience – both in curriculum content or case studies and through classroom dynamics. Further reflections on discipline specific context e.g. healthcare education where students understanding of unique LGBTQ+ health needs and experiences enhances professional competence.

5.4 Digital, online, blended learning skills

Internationally, educators' use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) alongside the broader shift toward blended and online learning, highlights both pedagogical and technological challenges that signal important future directions for staff development (Beckingham, et al., 2022; Munguia et al., 2024). Recent evidence from Scotland FE highlights strong demand for practical training in digital pedagogies, such as tracking student progress, organising online content, and delivering online assessment, reflecting the sector's continued shift toward blended and technology-enhanced learning (Diffley Partnership, 2024). Evidence also suggests a significant skills gap, particularly around AI use, with 53% of FE staff identifying it as a training need (Diffley Partnership, 2024).

At the same time, responding to labour market transformation, shaped by technological advancement, the transition to a net-zero economy and demographic change underscores the importance of coordinated, lifelong skills development aligned with the UK's industrial strategy and equitable access to opportunity (Crowley and Zemanik, 2025). The rapid expansion of fields such as AI, data science, information security and emerging areas like bioengineering, environmental and climate science have also highlighted the need for staff development that keeps pace with technological and labour market change (Mintz, 2024).

6. Conclusion - Implications for a tertiary approach to educator development

The overarching strategies and priorities across the tertiary sector, alongside the operational landscape, hold implications for the development of staff who teach or support learning from diverse backgrounds. The operational landscape outlined above highlights the challenges as we move towards a more unified tertiary sector and the opportunities for learning, sharing and collaboration. Sector differences underscore that coherence within a tertiary system does not imply uniformity. Rather, they highlight the need to understand why practices differ, what purposes they serve, and how learning can be shared without erasing sector-specific strengths.

Efforts to create a more coherent tertiary education sector provide opportunities not only to develop a more connected ecosystem but also to address the historical hierarchies and inequalities within the sector, such as that held HE and research to higher esteem, with greater recognition, resources, and career advancement opportunities. Therefore, adopting a tertiary lens requires care that we are not simply engaged in “tertiary-washing” - that is, calling something tertiary when it is really about university-level education or integrating the college sector into the broader higher education framework (Hazelkorn and Locke, 2023, p. 124). Rather, adopting a tertiary-focused and enhancement-driven approach that seeks parity between learning pathways could strengthen the role and influence of teaching and of educational developers within the sector (Anderson and Bamber, 2024). Conversely, there is clear potential to strengthen educator development through shared learning, alignment of principles, and recognition of diverse forms of expertise.

6.1 Questions and themes to guide discussions

The following questions and themes emerging from the literature review may guide discussions and sector-wide collaborations:

- **Structural differences and sector coherence**
 - On factors and trends that influence educator development structures across FE and HE - are there any significant differences evident, that have not been and should be specified in this report?
 - Why might one part of the sector be doing something different - or be perceived to be doing it better? What are the real benefits or drawbacks of these divergent approaches? (Anderson and Bamber, 2024).
- **Learning, sharing and collaboration** – What are the opportunities for collaboration in response to the challenges faced by institutions and the tertiary sector as a whole – such as, supporting diverse learners, integrating digital technologies, and responding to policy shifts?
- **Staying future oriented** – How can the tertiary sector deliver foundational teaching qualifications while preparing educators for evolving challenges? What steps ensure

educator development remains adaptable and future orientated, and how do mechanisms that support innovative pedagogies contribute?

- **Formal qualifications** - How should learning and teaching qualifications be better integrated across the tertiary sector?
- **Impact and evaluation** - How do or can institutions approach evaluation and balance measuring educator development outcomes at institutional, learner, and individual levels – particularly evaluating longer-term impact. Some examples are embedded in section 5, are these useful? Can others be suggested?
- **Access to staff development** - What forms of educator development are mandatory for new teachers, and how are opportunities extended to experienced educators or those new to tertiary teaching? How consistent is access across institutions, and what criteria determine participation in accredited programmes?
- **Culture and identity** - How does alignment with professional standards and or the FE or HE sector shape educators' sense of professional identity? Alexander Walker is currently exploring around this topic to understand how differing cultures and contexts influence how staff understand or identify as "tertiary".

6.2 Stakeholder perspectives and next steps

One of the main goals of this STEP project is to incorporate a variety of viewpoints from key stakeholders, including leaders, educators, staff (both as professionals and learners), and student learners. The next phase of the project will focus on capturing stakeholder perspectives as set out in section 1.3. This engagement will provide insight into how educators, institutions, and sector bodies perceive the evolving tertiary context and the implications for educator development. Findings will inform the development of the final report. In parallel, a series of high-impact case studies illustrating effective educator development practice across diverse institutional settings and a co-created resource exploring students' perspectives on the "future educator" within the tertiary context will be developed.

Appendix 1 – Project Leadership, Steering Group and Partners

The STEP Staff Development project is led collaboratively by the Glasgow School of Art, City of Glasgow College, and University West of Scotland through a shared leadership structure involving Leadership, Steering Group (comprising Collaborative and Student Partners), Delivery Team, and Consultative Partners.

Each partner in the project is listed in Table 1. The Steering Group was established in August 2025. Between August 2025 and June 2026, the Steering Group met regularly to progress project delivery, drawing on STEP Network Days as key opportunities for collaborative work. Activities during these sessions included horizon scanning of research, scholarship, and policy to identify key literature on educator development; developing the project’s literature review questions; and hosting presentations from three institutions that provided an overview of practice across HE, FE and tertiary institutions. Insights from these presentations were used to inform the development of this report. The Steering Group also contributed to the review and refinement of the report draft, ensuring coherence between emerging evidence, sector perspectives and project outcomes.

Further detail on the project delivery can be found in the STEP end of year project report for session 2025-26 [[LINK](#)].

Table 3. Project Leadership, Consultative and Collaborative Partners

Project Leadership	
Glasgow School of Art	Mark Charters
City of Glasgow College	Vic Boyd
University West of Scotland	Alison Gilmour
Collaborative Partners & Steering Group Members	
Abertay University	Julie Blackwell Young
Dundee and Angus College	Laura Watson
Fife College	Kathryn O'Loan
Glasgow Caledonian University	Fiona Kennedy
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	Jamie Mackay
Scotland’s Rural College	Christine Calder
sparqs	Catriona Bell
Student Member	Madeeha Kanwal
Student Member	Stephanie Grier

Student Member	Naledi Herman
Consultative Partners	
Herriot Watt University	Anne Tierney
UHI Orkney	Pauline Black
UHI Shetland	Kevin Briggs
University of Strathclyde	Sean Morrissey
University of the Highlands and Islands	Alexandra Walker
Delivery Team	
Delivery Team Research Fellow	Clare Matysova

Appendix 2 - Abbreviations

ADD - Active Digital Design

AI - Artificial Intelligence

CDN - College Development Network

CPD - Continual Professional Development

CSCS - Culturally Sensitive Curricula Scales

EHRC - Equality and Human Rights Commission

EDI - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

EUA - European University Association

FE – Further Education

FTE - Full Time Equivalent

GTCS - General Teaching Council for Scotland

GCU - Glasgow Caledonian University

GTAs - Graduate Teaching Assistants

HE – Higher Education

HEPI - Higher Education Policy Institute

HESA - Higher Education Statistics Agency

LMS - Learning Management System

PDRs - Professional Development Reviews

PgCerts - Postgraduate Certificates in Learning and Teaching

PgCAP – Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice

PGWT - Postgraduates Who Teach

PSF - Professional Standards Framework

QAA Cymru - Quality Assurance Agency Cymru

QAA Scotland - Quality Assurance Agency Scotland

REF – Research Excellence Framework

SRUC - Scotland's Rural University College

SCQF - Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

SFC - Scottish Funding Council

SQA - Scottish Qualification Authority

SEAPs - Self-Evaluation Action Plans

SFC – Scottish Funding Council

Sparqs - student partnerships in quality Scotland

STEP - Scottish Tertiary Enhancement Programme

SLE model - Student Learning Experience model

TQFE - Teaching Qualification in Further Education

TQEF - Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework

UHI - University of the Highlands and Islands

VLE- Virtual Learning Environment

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