



STEP

Scotland's Tertiary
Enhancement Programme

STEM Staff Referral and Early Intervention Guide – Student Feedback Updated

Updated to reflect student review of the proposed model

Updated evidence base: project proposal and Gantt commitments, current-practice mapping across 29 Scottish tertiary institutions, student interviews and focus group, and the new Student Review and Reflection session on the proposed model. The latest student feedback broadly validated the model, while asking for a simpler student-facing version, stronger visibility of technical/laboratory support, peer support, student choice, VLE/portal integration, and continued real-world testing.

How staff should use early indicators

Students broadly agreed that attendance, engagement, assessment difficulties, laboratory participation, confidence and communication are useful indicators. They also stressed that these should be used as supportive check-in prompts rather than as evidence that something is definitely wrong.

- Ask open, non-judgmental questions.
- Avoid assuming the cause of poor attendance, weak performance or missed activity.
- Check whether the issue is academic, technical, wellbeing, financial, personal or mixed.
- Recognise that a student may not know what type of support they need.
- Offer choice in the support route where feasible.
- Escalate only where risk, urgency or unresolved complexity requires it.

Updated early-warning prompts

- Repeated extension requests.
- Missed project meetings or reduced group-project involvement.
- Sudden drop in laboratory participation.
- Missed technical deadlines.
- Reduced willingness to ask questions in class or practical sessions.
- Withdrawal from normal peer or social activity.
- Avoidance of group activities or practical work.
- Loss of confidence despite continued attendance.

Warm referral and status tracking

Students valued warm referral and named follow-up. They also suggested that referrals should feel accountable. Where systems permit, staff should use a named contact, referral number, ticket, or status tracker so students know what has happened and what comes next.

STEM-specific staff actions

- Make rapid technical troubleshooting visible for programming, specialist software, circuits, test benches, equipment and laboratory work.
- Connect students to technical/laboratory staff early when the issue is practical or specialist rather than purely academic.
- Recognise group project difficulties as a legitimate support need, especially where communication, contribution or workload division is affecting progress.
- Signpost peer support where this is appropriate and safe.
- Explain support options in simple language and avoid relying on service jargon.

Implementation for staff and students

Students said the model will work only if both students and staff know how to use it. Implementation should therefore include staff training, student-facing communication, induction introduction, repeated reminders and local adaptation by each institution.