Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP)

STEP is a new national programme to help Scotland's colleges and universities work together to improve learning, teaching, and the student experience. It is part of a bigger framework to improve quality in Scotland's colleges and universities (Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework ([TQEF])). The programme is led by colleges and universities themselves and jointly managed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the College Development Network (CDN).

STEP focuses on helping colleges and universities work together on joint projects that create valuable results for the whole tertiary education sector (colleges and universities). Every four years, a topic will be chosen that these projects will be based around.

The topic for STEP's first cycle (2024–2028) is **supporting diverse learner journeys**. This topic was chosen after gathering a wide range of views from staff and students in colleges and universities, including at events in October 2023 and March 2024, and a survey in April 2024. Within the topic, there are four priority areas:

Supporting diverse learner journeys by…			
Supporting transitions and navigating pathways	Strengthening engagement, community and belonging	Developing skills and capabilities for learning	Delivering tailored, targeted and personalised support

The phases of STEP

STEP works on a four-year cycle which is split into three phases. During these phases, the joint projects are planned (discovery), carried out (implementation), and reviewed (reflection).

During the **discovery phase** (year 1), staff and students will meet for discovery days to form project teams and design projects. In between these days, there will be workshops, networking, and other activities to keep the momentum going. The focus will be on creating projects with clear outcomes and ensuring that all colleges and universities in Scotland are involved in at least one project.

In the **implementation phase (years 2 and 3)**, project teams will work on the projects that they developed and planned during the discovery phase. Activities in years two and three will include:
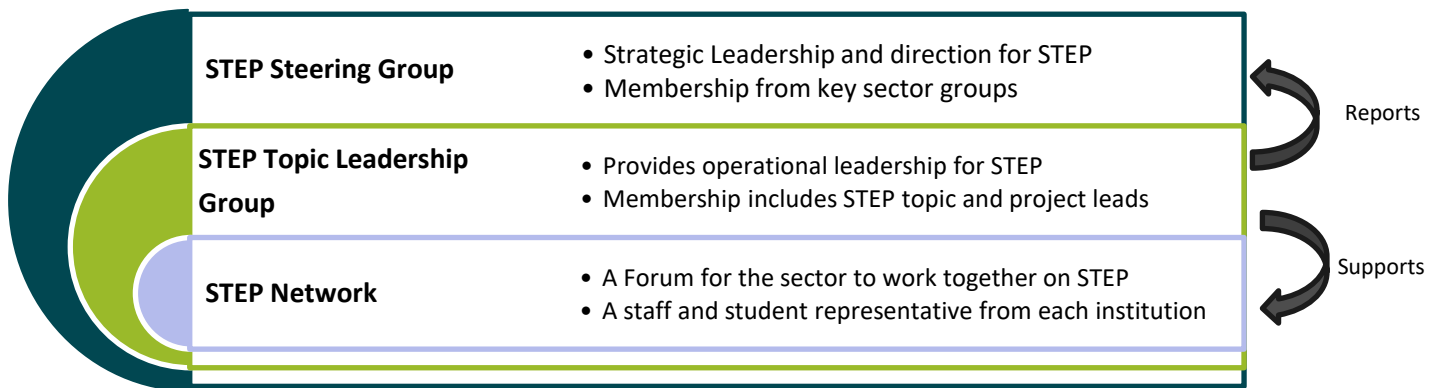
- Opportunities for project teams to meet in person.

- An annual conference to share updates and build networks

- A discovery day to develop new project ideas

- Any other topic-related sessions that participants might need.

Evaluation will be ongoing during the implementation phase, with each project team providing regular reports on their progress.

In the **reflection phase**, the STEP programme and its projects will be evaluated to see if they have achieved what they set out to do, and if this has made a positive change. Project results will be shared widely so that all colleges and universities can make use of these. This phase will also involve discussions with colleges, universities, and other stakeholders to select a relevant topic for the next four-year STEP cycle.

How STEP will be managed

Three groups made up of people who work and study in Scotland's colleges and universities will oversee STEP.

		Reports
STEP Steering Group	• Strategic Leadership and direction for STEP • Membership from key sector groups	
STEP Topic Leadership Group	• Provides operational leadership for STEP • Membership includes STEP topic and project leads	
STEP Network	• A Forum for the sector to work together on STEP • A staff and student representative from each institution	Supports

- The Steering Group will guide and oversee STEP, making sure it is successfully delivered.

- The Topic Leadership Group will provide the day-to-day leadership of STEP

- The STEP Network will bring together staff and students from each college and university in Scotland to work together on joint projects

During the discovery phase, members of the STEP Network will attend discovery days and workshops. The STEP Topic Leadership Group will guide and support project teams, and the STEP Steering Group will oversee progress and approve projects for implementation.

In the implementation phase, the STEP Steering Group will continue overseeing progress, with the Topic Leadership Group providing ongoing support. The STEP Network will continue to meet so that project teams can share updates and gather feedback from others.

How to get involved

The STEP Steering Group will be made up of members from existing groups, networks, and agencies. QAA and CDN will contact these groups to ask for nominations.

Each college and university will be asked to nominate one staff member and one student to join the STEP Network.

Staff and students from colleges and universities in Scotland can apply to become a STEP Topic Lead. The STEP Steering Group will choose the Topic Leads for each STEP cycle.

Steering Group	Topic Leadership Group	STEP Network
Nominations from sector groups	Self or peer nomination	Nominations from university and college quality contacts