



# STEP

Scotland's Tertiary  
Enhancement Programme

## Project Proposal Form 2024-25

This form is intended for completion by project teams that have formed through the STEP Network during session 2024-25. By engaging with the Discovery Days and Navigation Sessions, project teams should have much of the information required.

The purpose of this form is to provide the STEP Steering Group and supporting sector agencies (QAA and CDN) with sufficient information to confirm which projects will be supported. However, in order to ensure that institutions are able to support projects, we would strongly encourage project teams to produce detailed project plans at this stage.

**Please return this form to [info@step.ac.uk](mailto:info@step.ac.uk) no later than 5pm on Wednesday 11 June 2025.**

The STEP Steering Group will consider proposals at its meeting on Wednesday 25 June 2025, after which decisions and feedback will be communicated to project teams.

### 1. The Project Team

Please use the table below to indicate who will be involved with this project.

|                                 | Contact details (including name, job title, email and telephone number)                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Name of lead institution        | Edinburgh College<br>(Co-Lead) University of Edinburgh                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Name(s) of partner institutions | City of Glasgow College<br>New College Lanarkshire<br>University of Dundee<br>University of Glasgow<br>West College Scotland<br>Glasgow Caledonian University<br>West Lothian College<br>South Lanarkshire College<br>Glasgow Clyde College<br>Forth Valley College |

|  |                                                                                                                     |
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|  | Glasgow Kelvin College<br>Glasgow Clyde College<br>UHI<br>Dundee and Angus College<br>Dumfries and Galloway College |
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## 2. The Strategic Case

### 2.1 Title

#### **Supporting access, progression and successful outcomes in disabled student communities (SAPSO)**

This project fundamentally aims to put the student voice at the centre of this research by using the lived experience of tertiary education in Scotland, by the 5 student representatives, to better understand the student journey for disabled learners.

This project aims to put a spotlight on the attainment gap of Scotland's diverse student communities in the tertiary education sector.

The focus will be on diverse student journeys and pathways using the 'disability' student characteristic falling within equality, diversity and inclusion agenda.

Hearing the student voice through a range of mediums, regarding their routes to success, why they stayed on their course and what factors most supported their journey, rather than focus on withdrawal rates, will give a different perspective in making the improvements needed. Honest reflections from students will inform the success criteria for students in reaching their goals and aspirations into the future.

Using best practice case studies, qualitative and quantitative data analysis and the review of quality processes and procedures in tertiary institutions in Scotland.

This project will align with the 6 priority areas of the QAA STEP (TQEF) themes and framework;

- Excellence in learning, teaching and assessment
- Supporting student success
- Student engagement and partnership
- Enhancement and quality culture
- Externality
- Data and evidence

## 2.2 Context and rationale for project

The unique concept for this project will focus on current tertiary students for future tertiary students. Using live case studies through film and media (Podcasts) and taking full advantage of the STEP students in the SAPSO project group to drive innovative ways of engaging students in honest and reflective feedback about their journey.

By comparing student experience and outcomes across Further and Higher education for the first time will enable us to have a unique insight into the transition journey for our disabled students

Data will be used as a benchmark to demonstrate understanding of students who fall within the disability criteria in tertiary education with a focus on access, progression and outcomes for these learners across tertiary institutions in Scotland. It will highlight where tertiary institutions in the top quartile are ranking in key performance indicators (KPI's) and enable further evidence gathering to understand what makes the difference to a disabled student's success outcomes. Best practice will be highlighted, further tested across additional tertiary institutions to become part of the project conclusion and resource sharing at dissemination events.

### Data Collection Framework:

#### Objectives

- Identify barriers and enablers affecting the retention and success of disabled student groups.
- Understand student experiences across various learning pathways.
- Provide evidence-based recommendations to improve institutional practices and policies, such as enhancing the **student voice**; establishing a disability student steering group, involving disabled students in decision-making, support student-led disability networks and events, launch awareness campaigns and accessibility awards and celebrate International Day of Persons with Disabilities.
- Elevate the student voice to inform equitable, inclusive and data-informed decision-making.

#### Key student cohort (definitions used from Edinburgh College application form 2025)

- Students who identify as having a disability
  - **Learning disability** (a specific learning condition that effects the way you learn and process information)
  - **Development disorder** (a condition that you have had since childhood which affects motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills and speech and language)
  - **Long-term illness**, disease or condition (a condition not listed above, that you may have for life, which may be managed with treatment or medication)
  - **Mental health condition** (a condition that affects your emotional, physical and mental wellbeing)

- **Physical disability** (a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, lifting or carrying)
  - **Deafness or partial hearing loss**
  - **Blindness or partial sight loss**
- **Learning difficulty** (a condition that you have had since childhood that affects the way you learn, understand information or communicate)
  - **Full or partial loss of voice or difficulty speaking** (a condition that requires you to use equipment to speak)

### **Data Types & Sources (TQEF Data and evidence)**

- **Quantitative Data**
  - Student records to identify trends (enrolment, retention, completion, attainment)
  - Progression statistics (e.g. articulation, leaver destinations)
  - National survey data

- **Qualitative Data**

The student generated questions and methods of collection through 1:1 interviews, podcasts and short-form video will be responsive, agile and be led by the individual student feedback and evidence given.

- Student interviews and focus groups – capturing personal narratives and lived experience
  - Case studies of best practice identified across access, progression and successful outcomes for disabled students
  - Staff perspectives – academic and professional services staff working with target groups
- **Data Collection Methods**
    - Surveys
    - Interviews & Focus Groups
    - Self-evaluation documents
    - Case studies
    - Institutional and national data
  - **Previous research carried out in this area;**
  - OFFA/Office for Students (OfS): conducted extensive research on widening participation and required institutions to produce Access and Participation Plans (APPs)

- HEFCE Legacy Work: before being replaced by the OfS the higher education funding council for England supported research and funding into widening participation initiatives.
- The Sutton Trust: A leading charity conducting rigorous research into social mobility and access to top universities
- BIS (2014) National Strategy for Access and Student Success in HE: strategic document combining access and student access in one framework
- **Disabled Students and Inclusive Learning**

#### **Key Focus:**

- Supporting disabled students. Including neuro-diverse learners and those with mental health conditions through policies that meet the accessibility standards; physical and digital accessibility, support services, inclusive teaching and curriculum, tracking and monitoring student voice and advocacy

#### **Major Research:**

- Disabled students sector leadership group (DSSLG): recommendations for improving access and experience
- Thomas and May (2010): Research on inclusive curriculum design
- OfS-funded projects: Institutions funded to explore inclusive assessment, digital accessibility and transition support.

The Implementation of a phased roll-out of the 3year project will include; a pilot phase working with 2 Further Education Colleges and 2 Universities (year 1), followed by a further roll-out across 3 Further Education Colleges and 3 Universities (year 2), concluding with lessons learned and changes required culminating in the final finished project (year 3)

Impactful change will occur when the final resource is used by tertiary education establishments as part of the application, induction and on course resource for students and staff to make the student journey as frictionless as possible so that student success rates significantly improve for students identifying as having a disability.

## 2.3 Project scope



### Aim:

This project will be led by SAPSO students who will agree on the key data sets, interview questions, tertiary institutions, recording mediums, best practice case studies and dissemination activities. The focus will be ***‘by students, for students’***

This project will aim to provide tertiary student feedback from those identifying with disabilities about their journey to ***supporting student success***, what worked for them, what changes they would like to see in the future and how they coped with barriers along the way. Using data across the tertiary sector as a benchmark, could using best practice with policies, procedures and qualitative staff and student reflections improve the access, progression and successful outcome data for these learners?

Project team roles from project collaborators will include; **Student Mentors** (x1 staff x1 student) to work closely together to act as problem solvers and support structures throughout the project. **Milestone Leads** (x1 staff x1 student) to work closely together to act as timekeeper and scheduler throughout the project. **Communications Leads** (x1 staff x1 student) to work closely together to keep a reflective log on project impacts, social media around project delivery and keeping a large project group up to speed

### Objectives:

#### **Data and evidence**

Using the data collection framework (p3) to benchmark published Scottish Funding Council data across the tertiary education sector (both Further Education Colleges and Universities) for disabled learners. Where is there evidence of higher success rates, could there be further investigation, is there an improvement trend, could there be a change to practice.

- **Pilot Project (year 1) Review, Reflect, Refine**

Working with the student representatives, which tertiary institutions shall we select for phase 1 and why, what agreements need to be made, what questions do we need to ask? What students should be included, what staff shall be included, what is the timeline?

- x5 students from each of the x2 Further Education Colleges
- x5 students from each of the x2 Universities
- X2 staff from each of the FE colleges (x1 support/x1 academic)
- X2 staff from each of the Universities (x1 support/x1 academic)
- 1:1 Interview, Podcast, Short-form Video recording options

**Reviewing** what the qualitative and quantitative data is telling us, feedback from students and staff about the process, what are our **reflections**, what do we need to change or **refine** for the roll-out stage

- **Roll-out stage (year 2) Review, Evaluate, Change**

- x5 students from each of the x3 Further Education Colleges
- x5 students from each of the x2 Universities
- X2 staff from each of the FE colleges (x1 support/x1 academic)
- X2 staff from each of the Universities (x1 support/x1 academic)
- 1:1 Interview, Podcast, Short-form Video recording options

**Reviewing** what the qualitative and quantitative data is telling us, feedback from students and staff about the process, what are our **evaluations**, what do we need to **change** to enable disabled students to be successful learners

**Project Conclusion (year 3)-Sharing Symposium ‘by students for students’  
Demonstrate, Learn, Apply**

- Aims and objectives of the SAPSO project
- Show the film of the project
- **Student Mentor** role feedback
- **Student Milestone** Lead role feedback
- **Student Communication** Lead feedback
- What can the project **demonstrate**
- What can we **learn** from the project
- What can we **apply** from the project in our own organisations

### Project evidence generated from

- Student feedback will include x5 students from x5 Further Education Colleges (x25),
- X5 students from x5 Universities (x25) totalling x50 students across tertiary education
- Staff feedback will include x2 staff per organisation (x20) to include both support and academic
- Feedback will be collected through 1:1 interview (on-line or in person), Podcasts, short form videos
- The interview questions will be devised by the STEP student representatives
- Wherever possible Film & Media students and student associations will be engaged in the student feedback process throughout the project
- The data collection framework maps out how data will be used, however, if the Scottish Funding Council provide data then a data sharing agreement would not be required between organisations
- Agreement from students on using their feedback and for what purposes would need to be signed off at the start
- The outputs from the pilot stage would be shared and adjusted for the second roll-out to more organisations

### 2.4 Outcomes and indicators of success

Short term (one year)

**Pilot Stage;** x2 FE Colleges, X2 Universities

#### **Review, Reflect, Refine**

This first year will provide a proof of concept. Starting with analysing current published SFC data on the success outcomes for disabled learners across the Scottish tertiary sector for the first time together, what does it tell us. Where there are higher success rates then what does this tell us, can we use these institutions to delve deeper into why their students are performing better.

The **Mentor, Milestone** and **Communication** staff and student lead roles will be employed and evaluated  
Students to create the questions to enquire further, but still allow for responsive, agile student feedback led by the SAPSO students.

|                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                  | <p>By employing a range of student feedback methods as an alternative to survey fatigue, which work best (1:1 interview, podcast, short-form video)</p> <p><b>Reviewing</b> what the qualitative and quantitative data is telling us, feedback from students and staff about the process, what are our <b>reflections</b>, what do we need to change or <b>refine</b> for the roll-out stage</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Medium term (two to three years) | <p><b>Roll-out Stage:</b> x3 FE Colleges, X3 Universities</p> <p><b>Review, Evaluate, Change</b></p> <p>Changes may/will have occurred to the student and staff questions used, Institutions visited, students interviewed, and the methods used from the outcome of the pilot project stage</p> <p>The <b>Mentor, Milestone</b> and <b>Communication</b> staff and student lead roles will be employed and evaluated</p> <p><b>Reviewing</b> what the qualitative and quantitative data is telling us, feedback from students and staff about the process, what are our <b>evaluations</b>, what do we need to <b>change</b> to enable disabled students to be successful learners</p>                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Long term (over three years)     | <p><b>Project Conclusion Stage-Sharing Symposium ‘by students for students’</b></p> <p><b>Demonstrate, Learn, Apply</b></p> <p>By using the SAPSO student roles to be fully embedded into this project keeps students at the centre of being the changemakers for the future</p> <p>The SAPSO student rep learning journey will be the key to enable passing the baton from one student rep to another as the student rep roles end and new ones are recruited.</p> <p>The success will be in concluding the project from the initial aims and objectives, in demonstrating the outcomes and learning from the qualitative and quantitative data, to applying the changes in the tertiary sector by <b>‘students for students’</b></p> <p>Can we be confident that the changes we make will improve the success criteria for disabled learners in the Scottish tertiary sector</p> |

### 3. Project planning

#### 3.1 Activities and outputs

Previous sector research in the area of access, progression and successful outcomes for students with disabilities in the tertiary sector has occurred mainly within the University sector. With the recent move for QAA into the Further Education sector, has enabled an opportunity for Scottish Further Education Colleges and Universities to work together on joint projects that affect all of their learners. The addition of student association members in the QAA STEP projects has added an additional benefit that the SAPSO group will learn from by focussing on the **‘by students for students’** ethos

The SAPSO project will be driven by the student representatives, fully supported by the staff members by the addition of joint staff and student roles for **Student Mentor**, **Milestone Lead** and **Communication Lead** roles to supplement the project lead, project contributor and project consultative roles.

The key activities will include gaining disabled student feedback through 1:1 interview, Podcast or short-form video, using film and media students to generate the evidence required. The questions will be designed **by students for students**.

We aim to include both support and academic staff from each of the tertiary institutions selected for evidence gathering

A **pilot stage (yr1)** will be established to provide proof of concept and a **review, reflect, refine** process undertaken before rolling out in year 2 to more tertiary institutions.

The **roll-out stage (yr2)** will culminate in a **review, evaluate** and **change** agenda looking at all the qualitative and quantitative data sets

The **project conclusion stage (yr3)** will provide a **student sharing symposium, by students for students, to demonstrate, learn and apply** the changes that tertiary organisations should adopt to improve the success criteria for disabled students in Scotland

The success and impact of this project will be measured through KPI data and student feedback for disabled students in future years

#### 3.2 Timeline

|                    |                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Session 2025-26    | X16 Institutions plus x3 student representatives involved                                                               |
| <b>Pilot Stage</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ X2 Further Education Colleges</li></ul>                                         |
| <b>Review</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ X2 Universities</li><li>○ X1 staff/x1 student rep Student Mentor role</li></ul> |

|                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Reflect</b><br><b>Refine</b>                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ X1 staff/x1 student rep Milestone Lead role</li> <li>○ X1 staff/x1 student rep Communications Lead role</li> <li>○ Lead Institution + Admin Support</li> <li>○ Collaborative Partners</li> <li>○ Consultative Partners</li> <li>○ X20 Tertiary students</li> <li>○ X12 Film &amp; Media Students</li> <li>○ X4 QAA Discovery Days</li> <li>○ X4 QAA Navigation on-line sessions</li> <li>○ Monthly SAPSO on-line meetings</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Session 2026-27<br><b>Roll-Out Stage</b><br><b>Review</b><br><b>Evaluate</b><br><b>Change</b>    | X16 Institutions plus x3 student representatives involved <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ X3 Further Education Colleges</li> <li>○ X3 Universities</li> <li>○ X1 staff/x1 student rep Student Mentor role</li> <li>○ X1 staff/x1 student rep Milestone Lead role</li> <li>○ X1 staff/x1 student rep Communications Lead role</li> <li>○ Lead Institution + Admin Support</li> <li>○ Collaborative Partners</li> <li>○ Consultative Partners</li> <li>○ X30 Tertiary students</li> <li>○ X18 Film &amp; Media Students</li> <li>○ X4 QAA Discovery Days</li> <li>○ X4 QAA Navigation on-line sessions</li> <li>○ Monthly SAPSO on-line meetings</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                 |
| Session 2027-28<br><b>Conclusion Stage</b><br><b>Demonstrate</b><br><b>Learn</b><br><b>Apply</b> | X16 Institutions plus x3 student representatives involved <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ X10 Tertiary students (FE/HE)</li> <li>○ X4 Film &amp; Media students</li> <li>○ X1 staff/x1 student rep Student Mentor role</li> <li>○ X1 staff/x1 student rep Milestone Lead role</li> <li>○ X1 staff/x1 student rep Communications Lead role</li> <li>○ Lead Institution + Admin Support</li> <li>○ Collaborative Partners</li> <li>○ Consultative Partners</li> <li>○ X30 Tertiary students</li> <li>○ X18 Film &amp; Media Students</li> <li>○ X4 QAA Discovery Days</li> <li>○ X4 QAA Navigation on-line sessions</li> <li>○ Monthly SAPSO on-line meetings</li> <li>○ Sharing symposium <b>by students for students</b></li> <li>○ Final media resource to share across tertiary institutions</li> </ul> |

### 3.3 Project management

- SAPSO **student reps** taking a lead in the engagement of the project
- **Roles & responsibilities** established with agreed role descriptions
- **Lead Institution** and Lead role including administration of QAA attendance events
- **Collaborative Partners** including **Student Mentor, Milestone Lead and Communications Lead** (shared between staff and student rep members)
  - X2 FE College, X2 Universities Pilot project year 1
  - X3 FE Colleges, X3 Universities year 2
- **Consultative Partners** –
  - Review, Reflect, Refine (yr1)
  - Review, Evaluate, Change (yr2),
  - Demonstrate, Learn, Apply (yr3)

#### Risk

- The student rep turnover in May of each of the 3year project timeline
- Need to ensure smooth handover and support for new student reps
- Keeping the energy and engagement up across the large group of tertiary institutions in the SAPSO project (16 institutions and 3 student representatives)
- Sharing out of the roles and responsibilities so that equal time and commitment is given
- Administration of travel and accommodation organisation between institutions for the 4 discovery days each year
- Payment system for students through lead Institution

### 3.4 Student engagement and partnership

This project fundamentally aims to put the student voice at the centre of this research by using the lived experience of tertiary education in Scotland, by the 3 student representatives, to better understand the student journey for disabled learners.

The SAPSO student reps will take the lead role in how to design, develop and engage tertiary students throughout this project therefore they will work alongside a partner staff member in the **student mentor, milestone** and **communication lead** roles. This means that the student engagement and partnership working will be fully embedded throughout. The final conclusion of the project and student symposium will follow the ethos of '**by students for students**'

- strategically planned:
- effective students' association:
- diversity of student voices:
- training and professional development:

- solution focused:
- genuine dialogue:
- recognises and rewards students:
- actions that are communicated:

#### Surveying students

Qualitative student feedback will be through 1:1 interviews, podcasts and short-form videos during the pilot stage and roll-out stages

X50 Tertiary students (x25 FE College/x25 University) through 1:1 Interviews, Podcasts and Short form videos

Questions designed by the SAPSO student reps '**by students for students**'

### 3.5 Dissemination

Symposium, Conference, Roadshow, Media resource

The output of the 3year project will be a film and reflective journey through the SAPSO project. The vision is for a final student symposium which the SAPSO student rep will lead on and share the qualitative and quantitative data sets, Pilot stage, roll-out stage and final conclusions

The symposium will be '**by students for students**' and will include all of the students involved in the QAA Step projects, who took part in the SAPSO project and include the 16 SAPSO organisations as well as others who would like to attend

The findings and outputs can be shared at future QAA and CDN events across Scotland

The film resource can be made available on QAA and CDN websites as well as all tertiary institutions across Scotland