

Student Engagement Staff Network

Thursday 23rd October 2025

Welcome!



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Your sparqs team today



Amy Monks
Development
Consultant

Chase Greenfield
Development
Consultant

Shona Agnew
Development
Consultant

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Ok team...

- You can use your audio or the chat box to speak.
- Mute your microphone when not talking.
- To speak, type * in the chat box or click the “raise hand” icon.
- If you are having any tech issues, post a comment in the chat.



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Agenda



10.00am - **Welcome and Ice Breaker**

10.20am - **What is SESN?**

10.30am - **Learn, Develop, Share Activity**

10.50am - **Sailboat Activity**

11.10am - **Break**

11.25am - **Buddy Scheme & Comms**

11.45am - **STEP Intro**

12.00pm - **Discussion/Q&A**

12.20pm - **Evaluation**

12.30pm - **Close**

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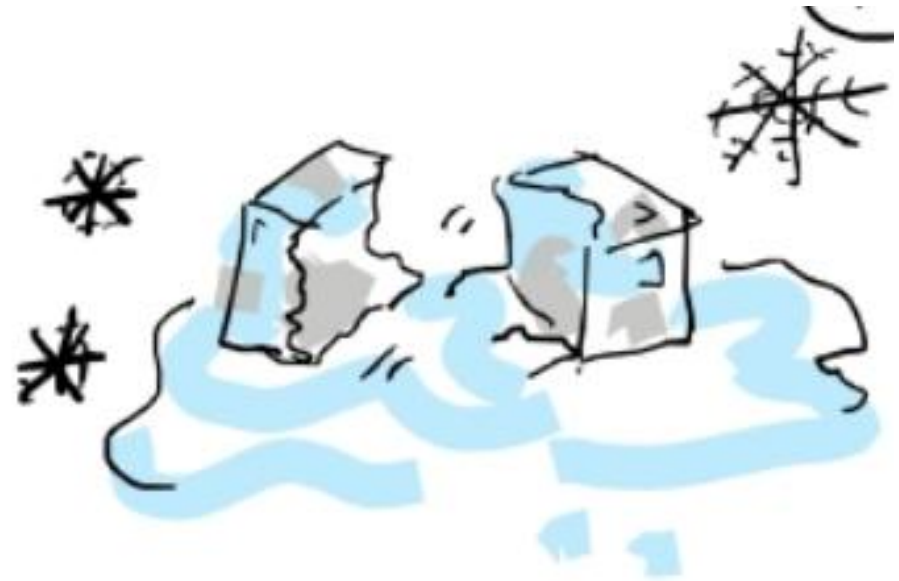
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Does your desk tell a story?



- Your name
- Your Institution
- Your role
- Item on your desk (or nearby) that has a story



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Student Engagement Staff Network (SESN)



What is SESN?

A professional network supported by sparqs for staff who coordinate and support student engagement in quality across colleges, universities, and students' associations.

Why It Matters:

Student engagement is key to shaping learning. SESN supports the staff who make this happen—those managing rep systems, supporting officers, and ensuring student voices influence quality processes.

How SESN Helps:

Through its “learn, share, develop” approach, SESN offers sector updates, peer learning, and practical resources like the Induction Guide for Academic Representation Co-ordinators

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Activity – Learn, Develop, Share



What do the words Learn, Develop & Share mean to you and for your role in a students' association?

This activity will explore what SESN can offer you under these themes.

L ◦ Learn
D ◦ develop
S ◦ Share.

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Learn

Consider...

- What does “learning” look like for you in your participation within SESN?
- Can you share an example of something you’d hope to learn through your engagement with sparqs?
- How do you know when learning has made a meaningful impact on your professional development?

L ◦ *Learn*
D ◦ *develop*
S ◦ *Share.*

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Develop

Consider...

- In what ways have you developed professionally through your involvement in SESN or sparqs activities?
- What does “development” mean to you beyond gaining new skills—does it include confidence, leadership, or something else?
- How do you actively seek opportunities to develop within your current role or network?

L ◦ Learn
D ◦ develop
S ◦ Share.

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Share

Consider...

- What does “sharing” mean to you in your participation within SESN?
- How might connecting with others through sparqs or SESN help you gain new insights or opportunities?
- How do you build and maintain meaningful professional relationships across the sector?

L ◦ Learn
D ◦ develop
S ◦ Share.

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Sailboat Activity

The sailboat activity helps teams reflect on their journey by identifying what propels them forward (the wind), what holds them back (the anchors), and what risks lie ahead (the rocks), guiding collaborative discussion and goal-setting (island).



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Activity - Sailboat

In this activity I want you to think about you, your development, your role.

- 2 minutes each section
- Discuss
- Write your answers in the chat



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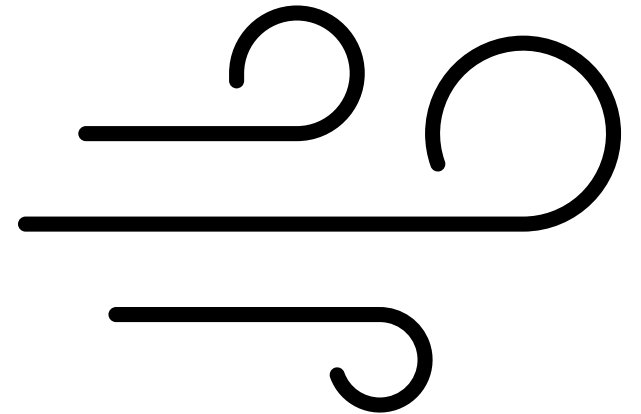
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Activity - Sailboat

Wind – What is pushing you forward? What is going well right now?

- 2 minutes
- Write your answers in the chat/discuss



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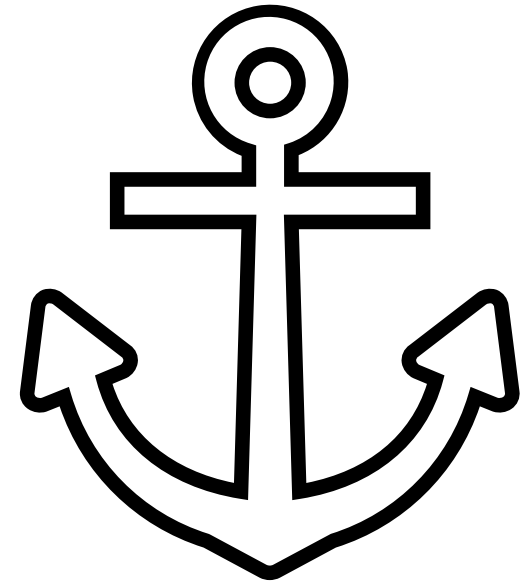
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Activity - Sailboat

Anchor – What is holding you back? What are the challenges?

- 2 minutes
- Write your answers in the chat/discuss



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Activity - Sailboat

Desert Island – What are your goals? What would the positive impact be?

- 2 minutes
- Write your answers in the chat/discuss



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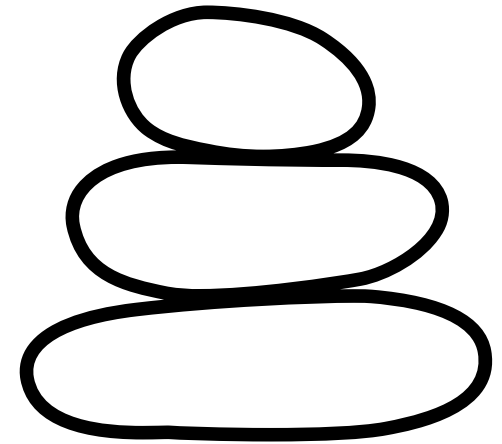
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Activity - Sailboat

Rocks – What are potential barriers to your goals? What do you need to be mindful of?

- 2 minutes
- Write your answers in the chat/discuss



**Break – 15 minutes/ back at
11.25am**



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Buddy Scheme

The sparqs Buddy Scheme aim is to pair student engagement practitioners, working in students' associations and institutions across Scotland, to give each pair the opportunity to discuss, share practice and have a sounding board external to your institution.

The scheme runs until the end of academic year 2025/26.

Registration has closed but please let us know in the chat if you would like to be added.



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Comms



What sparqs currently uses to communicate with SESN:

- Jiscmail/Email
- Social Media; LinkedIn, Instagram, X, Bluesky
- Articles
- Development Consultants
- Website



What other methods might be useful?

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Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme – Update from sparqs

Chase Greenfield | Development Consultant



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What is STEP?

- **Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP)**
 - <https://www.step.ac.uk/>
- **National enhancement programme** as a mechanism within the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF).
- **Jointly managed** by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and College Development Network (CDN).
- Built around sector-wide **collaborative enhancement projects**.
- Follows a **four-year cycle** with three phases:
 - **Discovery** – design and plan projects collaboratively.
 - **Implementation** – deliver and evaluate projects.
 - **Reflection** – assess impact and embed outcomes into practice.

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sparqs's Role in STEP

- Coordinate and support projects' approaches to student engagement and partnership
- Supporting the development of students' association-focused guide related to involvement in STEP
- Leading a project

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Current Theme

- **2024–2028 theme:** *Supporting Diverse Learner Journeys.*
 - Focus areas include:
 - Transitions and pathways
 - Engagement, community, and belonging
 - Skills and capabilities for learning
 - Tailored and personalised support.
- 7 Projects related to this theme

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Project Areas

- Appreciating Belonging and Enabling Change: From Strategy to Practice
- Regional Enhancement and Collaboration in Tertiary Scotland (REACTS)
- Supporting Access, Progression and Successful Outcomes in Disabled Student Communities (SAPSO)
- Strategies to Support Student Engagement and Partnership Within an Increasingly Time-Poor and Cash-Poor Student Population
- Transforming Assessment Policy and Practice in Scotland (TAPPS)
- Understanding the Staff Development Landscape Required to Support Diverse Learner Journeys in the Tertiary Sector

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Call for Project Proposals



- Up to £10,000 in **project funding is available** for “Delivering Tailored, Targeted, and Personalised Support”
 - Can be for a specific cohort or group of students with a particular characteristic
- Requirements include:
 - Must be related to the “Supporting Diverse Learner Journeys” theme
 - Must be collaborative, involving multiple institutions/agencies
 - Must involve students as partners
- More details on the [QAA Website](#) – **Deadline 3 December 2025**

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sparqs-Led Project

Strategies to Support Student Engagement and Partnership Within an Increasingly Time-Poor and Cash-Poor Student Population



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An increasingly time and cash poor student population



- Record numbers of **students in paid employment** during term time (56% in 2024)
- Those who are working are **working more** (14.5h/week on average).
- Other **intersecting factors**, such as:
 - a growing population of students with caring responsibilities
 - worsening mental health crisis among students
 - challenges student homelessness, estrangement, and food insecurity

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Strategies to Support Student Engagement & Partnership



Student Voice & Representation

- **Pilot workshops** with ~6 students' associations
- **Identifying** and **breaking down** financial and time-based **barriers** to:
 - **Representation systems**
 - **Student voice**
 - **Officer roles**
- Further guidance on **incentives, inclusive feedback mechanisms**, etc.

Pre-Arrival Information

- Researching **student needs** for pre-arrival advice & guidance
- Developing **resources** to support time/cash poor student population such as:
 - **Template materials** for pre-arrival guidance
 - Peer-led **buddy framework**
 - Supporting **learning & teaching** experience

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Follow this project

- “Strategies to support student engagement and partnership for an increasingly time and cash poor student population”
- STEP Website: www.step.ac.uk
- Contact us for:
 - Project updates
 - Pilot resources
 - Workshop outline and good practice guidance
 - Template materials
 - Research findings
- Email: chase.greenfield@sparqs.ac.uk



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Sources & Resources



Resources

- [St Andrews Student Partnership Agreement](#)
- [Student Learning Experience Model](#)
- [Scotland's Ambition for Student Partnership](#)
- [sparqs Website](#)

Sources

- HEPI "[Student Academic Experience Survey 2024](#)"
- NUS Scotland "[Cost of Survival](#)" (2023).
- SFC "[Report on Widening Access](#)" (2023 – updated 2024)
- sparqs "[sparqs Institutional Visits \(Oct 2024 – Jan 2025\)](#)" (2025)

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Discussion Questions

1. How, at your institution (or students' association), are you seeing barriers of time/cash impact student engagement and partnership?
2. Who is involved in STEP at your institution, and what support and guidance would be helpful from sparqs to support student engagement/partnership in STEP?
3. What ideas do you have for a collaborative project related to supporting diverse learner journeys?

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Discussion/Q&A



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Next SESN

Thursday 27th November
10am – 12pm
MS Teams



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Before you go...

- Complete the evaluation
- Remind your Officers to sign up for NEON!
Tuesday 28th October -10am to 1pm
- Sign up for the next SESN Session
- Sign up to the sparqs articles
- Sign up to the [sparqsSESN Jiscmail list](#)
(and do use the list to chat and share!)

SESN EVALUATION 2025/26



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