STEP | Supporting Trauma-Informed Higher Education Practices

Supporting Trauma-Informed Higher Education Practices

STEP Project Newsletter #5

From Evidence to Practice: Developing the STEP Curriculum

The STEP project has reached an important milestone in developing a curriculum for training higher education staff in trauma-informed approaches. A comprehensive draft curriculum has now been developed, bringing together research evidence, findings from the STEP project, and pedagogical approaches aimed at strengthening educators' knowledge and practical competences in trauma-informed teaching.

The development process was guided by both existing research and empirical findings collected within the STEP project. Through interviews, a lecturer survey, and a student survey across five European partner institutions, the project explored experiences, needs, and challenges related to trauma-informed teaching in different higher education contexts. These findings played a central role in identifying relevant training topics and shaping the curriculum's pedagogical structure.

A key consideration throughout the development process was to ensure that the curriculum goes beyond providing theoretical knowledge about trauma. Instead, it aims to support educators in understanding trauma-related challenges, reflecting on their own teaching approaches, and developing practical competences for responding to students' different needs.

Three Modules Following a Progressive Approach

The curriculum was structured around three interconnected modules:

- Module 1: Foundations of Trauma and Its Relevance in Higher Education
- Module 2: Trauma-Informed Teaching: Principles, Reflection, and Self-Care
- Module 3: Practicing Trauma-Informed Approaches

The modules follow a progressive pedagogical concept. Starting with foundational

SAVONIA DHBW Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University FH JOANNEUM University of Applied Sciences iMiN Khmelnytsky National University Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Finnish National Agency for Education. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

knowledge about trauma and its relevance in higher education, the curriculum moves towards understanding trauma-informed teaching principles, reflecting on their implications, and planning their implementation. The final module focuses on applying these principles to concrete teaching situations. This structure reflects a central pedagogical objective of the curriculum: to connect knowledge with reflection, planning, and practical application, enabling educators to consider how trauma-informed approaches can be integrated into their professional practice.

Translating Trauma-Informed Principles into Teaching Practice

An important part of the curriculum development process has been the identification of practical areas through which trauma-informed principles can be adopted to support students affected by trauma in higher education:

- Fostering Safety in Learning Environments
- Providing Flexible and Responsive Learning
- Building Community and Connecting Students with Support
- Managing Sensitive Content and Responding to Student Distress
- Embedding Trauma-Informed Practices at the Institutional Level

These areas form a central part of Module 3 and translate trauma-informed principles into practical training content. Particular attention has been given to developing content that educators can relate to their own teaching experiences. Through practical examples and reflection tasks, the curriculum aims to encourage participants to consider how these approaches can be applied in different educational situations, while also recognizing their professional roles and boundaries.

Target Group and Learning Format

The curriculum primarily addresses educators in higher education, while also considering other university staff who regularly interact with students. Its content is designed to be relevant across different academic disciplines and adaptable to different institutional and national contexts.

According to the current draft, the curriculum comprises 3.65 ECTS credits, corresponding to approximately 91.25 hours of total workload.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Finnish National Agency for Education. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

A blended learning format has been proposed, combining in-class training with individual learning phases. A substantial part of the workload is dedicated to independent learning, self-reflection, and case-based activities. This approach is intended to provide participants with opportunities to engage with the training content at their own pace and connect the acquired knowledge with their individual professional experiences.

Next Steps: Partner Workshop and Curriculum Testing

With the draft curriculum now developed, the next stage will focus on reviewing its content, exploring its applicability across different higher education contexts, and identifying opportunities for further improvement. An important step in this process will be the upcoming STEP partner workshop on 30 November and 1 December 2026, hosted at ITG–DHBW.

During the workshop, project partners will jointly discuss the curriculum's content and pedagogical structure, reflect on country-specific needs, and consider how the training can be adapted to different educational and institutional settings. The workshop will also include initial testing of selected curriculum activities, allowing partners to gain initial practical experience with the proposed learning activities and approaches. These discussions will help identify potential gaps, necessary adjustments, and further opportunities to strengthen the curriculum.

By bringing together research evidence, project findings, and feedback from the participating partners, STEP aims to further develop a training program that is both pedagogically grounded and responsive to the realities of higher education across different European contexts.

SAVONIA DHBW Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University FH JOANNEUM University of Applied Sciences iMiN Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Finnish National Agency for Education. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.