The STEPS grids

The cornerstone of the system is a simple grid and a progressive set of attainment targets that present challenge at all levels of ability across KS3. Understanding the concept and language of these grids is key to implementing the programme, and therefore focus is given to these first.

Each subject has its own grid and the grids are flexible, as are the types of target and the nature of the attainment. Some subjects are essentially skills-based while others are a mixture of knowledge and skill acquisition. The grids can be found at the end of this book (pages 48–83), editable versions are on the digital component and they are also in the STEPS Grid Handbook and the subject teacher guides.

While flexibility is crucial to, and inherent in, the system, there is also a uniformity to the overall feel of the STEPS grid, to make it user-friendly. The following elements are therefore generic to the system. Each is dealt with in greater depth in the following sections.

- Strands – there are four, five or six Strands per subject.
- Steps – there are nine Steps per subject, per Strand.
- Forward estimates – throughout Key Stage 3 and end of Key Stage 4 estimates.

The expected progress is an average of one whole Step in each year of KS3, or three Steps by the end of Year 9.

Strands

What are the Strands?

Every subject sub-divided the KS3 Programme of Study into a workable number of 'Strands'. A 'Strand' was defined as an area of study or distinct aspect of the work covered; at its basic level it could even be an expanded topic or method of delivery. Each Programme of Study has been broken down into four, five or six Strands.

Weighting

The Strands are either equally-weighted or double-weighted. This allows for a numerical score for each Strand to be determined, allowing incremental progression to be shown. All the Strands together add up to one complete Step. Five Strands are ideal because it means each Strand has a numerical value of 0.2, if equally-weighted. This allows the system to perform for both qualitative and quantitative purposes and provide both simple and complex feedback to all stakeholders.

In some subjects, such as Drama, where 'performance' is crucial to the overall attainment, the Strand is double-weighted. This allows the same STEPS grid model to work for a specific subject and be tailored to its requirements, while still fitting in with the overall system.

Most subjects therefore follow one of these approaches:

- Five Strands of equal weighting (0.2).
- Four Strands of equal weighting; each valued at 0.25.
- Four Strands, with one double-weighted to indicate its importance to the Programme of Study; therefore three Strands valued at 0.2 and one at 0.4.
- Six Strands of equal weighting; although the number of Strands is not a good one to calculate, it is rounded to the nearest tenth for the Step Point Score.

The weighting is identified on the STEPS grids so that all users can readily associate the importance of each element. The weighting is calculated to achieve the Step Point Score which is reported to parents and students, and which is recorded for progress monitoring purposes (see page 13).

Steps

Every subject has nine Steps, where 9 is the highest Step and 1 is the lowest Step. Steps are simply the incremental divisions of a pathway through the Programme of Study for each Strand.

The Step that students start on is determined through the baseline assessment at the start of Year 7. The expected progression of an average student over the course of one academic year is one Step. As an average child can be hard to find, it is perhaps better to view the expected progress through the Steps for each Strand as a whole, over the entire Key Stage, and anticipate a more normal advancement to be a total of three Steps in the three years of KS3.

STEPS is a flexible system and can cope with student individuality. Apart from the flexibility to allow for different rates of progress up a Strand, STEPS assumes that students may have strengths and weaknesses within a subject; slower advancement in one Strand can be compensated by more rapid advancement in another.

Every Step contains one or more descriptors of attainment that have been identified as comparable to that stage of development in the subject and, most importantly, progression to the next Step above represents advancement in an area of required knowledge, understanding or skill. The next Step, therefore, becomes a target, and the combination of each next Step is a very personalised set of targets for the continued achievement of each student. A student should achieve all the descriptors of attainment to move to the next Step.

Step Point Score

The Step Point Score is the overall score of a student within a subject to give a quick measure of overall progress. Each student will be given a Step score for each Strand (and the results of each Strand may vary). To calculate the Step Point Score, add up each Strand's Step score for a subject and divide by the number of Strands and then add one. If you think of each Step as a ten-point scale (for example, 2.0–2.9) then a student who achieves all of the Step 2 criteria on every Strand will actually be at 3.0, starting at the bottom of the next Step scale. Therefore one is added as a constant to reflect this.

So, for example, for a subject with five Strands of equal weighting,

Strand 1	Strand 2	Strand 3	Strand 4	Stand 5
Step 2	Step 3	Step 2	Step 2	Step 2

would lead to a Step Point Score of:
(2 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 2) ÷ 5 + 1 = 3.2 to one decimal place.

It is important to note that Strands that are double-weighted should be counted twice. For example:

Strand 1	Strand 2	Strand 3	Strand 4
Step 3	Step 4	Step 4	Step 3

If Strand 4 is double-weighted then it would be (3 + 4 + 4 + 3 + 3) ÷ 5 + 1 = 4.4 (note that you are also dividing by five Strands, not four).

This provides a fine-level quantitative assessment recorded as a decimal rounded (as necessary) to one decimal place, although this can also be recorded to a greater degree of accuracy if required. For guidance on how to set up an initial Step baseline when entering Year 7, see page 22.