

# StuComm step-up report

July 2020



'Step up' is a health check programme for start-ups and has been developed by Jisc in consultation with the sector and in partnership with Emerge Education. The health check aims to scrutinise start-ups against key sector requirements, to provide institutions with a certain level of assurance when they are considering engaging with these new enterprises. The accreditations awarded following the vetting process form general information only and are not intended to amount to advice on which an institution should solely rely.



StuComm has been assessed in July 2020 and is judged to be ready for full scale implementation. Based on our assessment the company has the capabilities for implementation at multiple institutions.

StuComm is used by 32 institutions in The Netherlands, 1 institution in the UK, with a total of 650,000 users. The company meets all legal and technical requirements, is financially stable, and has a consistent pricing model.

Company: StuComm B.V. (incorporated in The Netherlands) | Company Number: 61000531 (NL) | VAT No: 000030140242 (NL) |

Date of formation: 01 July 2014 | Date of assessment: July 2020

Web address: <https://stucomm.com>

Key contact: Luke Billings, UK Sales Manager, e: [luke@stucomm.com](mailto:luke@stucomm.com), t: 07449115407



**Luke Billings, UK Sales Manager at StuComm, provides an overview and explains the problem and solution StuComm solves.**

**StuComm helps students succeed on campus. With the StuCommApp, educational institutions are able to deliver the right information, at the right time, via the right channel, to their students.**

## Problem and Solution

Improving student communication is an ever-present issue. The Office for Students has highlighted the importance of educational institutions needing to make communications with students clearer. Nowadays, checking email or intranet is not the most efficient way for students to receive important communication.

Our mission is to improve communication between institutions and their students, and we do so by providing a communication tool that fulfils students' needs. We enable universities to deploy a modern communication strategy that helps students succeed, making everyone's campus experience more enjoyable.

## Assessment summary table

Criteria		Assessed as
<b>Legal requirements</b>	Company registration	✓
	Insurance	✓
	GDPR	✓
<b>Business proposition and solution</b>	Articulated problem and solution	✓
	Working product	✓
	Existing implementations	✓
	Designed to meet user requirements and evidence of impact/efficacy	✓
	Consistent and validated pricing model	✓
	Financial track record and longevity	✓
<b>Team and capacity</b>	Background and skills	✓
	Development planning	✓
	Scalability	✓
<b>Data and information security</b>	Minimum technical requirements	✓
	Advanced technical requirements	✓
	Product integration	✓
	Good practise and accessibility	✓ <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> StuComm have a plan to be WCAG 2.1 level AA compliant within the required timeline.

## Assessment details

Legal requirements		
<b>Legal requirements</b>	The company is legally established to trade within the UK.	✓
<b>Insurance</b>	The company has professional and employee's liability insurance.	✓
<b>GDPR compliance</b>	There is a documented process to keep records in compliance with GDPR and a published privacy policy. Staff are trained on GDPR and kept up to date via weekly meetings and reports.	✓
Business proposition and solution		
<b>Articulated problem and solution</b>	There is a clear definition of the strategic problem addressed by the solution. Its relevance to the UK HE/FE sector is validated through publications, research, government policy, or evidence of market demand.	<p>Universities want to communicate with their students, and vice versa. It makes difference on campus when those channels of communication are open. But why the struggle in the first place? Why is it that students are often frustrated on campus, and universities don't have the opportunity to communicate effectively?</p> <p>The problem is not a lack of communication, per se, but the channel used to communicate. Students on campus today are born into a digital world and grow up swiping and tapping. They expect the same technology facilities in their daily lives on campus.</p> <p>The StuCommApp consolidates all of their key information from these multiple systems and puts it right in their pocket. With the StuCommApp students login once find to their university life at their fingertips: Timetable, results, study progress, contacts, and more. StuComm believes communication is a two-way street, so the app has features that allow students to engage with their university - they can give feedback, sign-up for events, courses and exams and even register their attendance within the StuCommApp.</p> <p>The existence of the problem has been validated through media materials.</p>
<b>Working product</b>	The company can provide institutions with a working product ready for use.	There is a working product, with video walkthroughs and a demo login available. ✓

<b>Existing implementations</b>	The product has been used and evaluated through existing implementations, with success metrics defined and tracked consistently.	StuComm has been used in 33 institutions across The Netherlands and UK, with 650,000 students.  There are a defined set of metrics that are tracked consistently. There is clear onboarding documentation, with average time to full deployment self-reported at 1 month.	✓
<b>Designed to meet user requirements and evidence of impact/efficacy</b>	The product has been designed with user engagement in mind and the company is able to define and track successful use for reporting over the course of/at the end of implementation.  The company's solution helps address individual institutional priorities and requirements and there is demonstrable impact of the solution on the problem.	The company tracks the following satisfaction and usage metrics in order to make sure students have access to the right information, with an overall goal of ensuring the majority of students are using the app: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student satisfaction with the information they are getting,</li> <li>• Student satisfaction with the user experience</li> <li>• Number of students using the app</li> <li>• Number of sessions per week</li> </ul> Using an institutions metrics, decisions about changes can then be made to various aspects of the app, such as what is communicated to students, user experience, and adding new features.  StuComm also has student panels at universities which provide qualitative feedback to improve the student experience.  In a case study, the company provided evidence of improving an institutions National Student Enquirer (Dutch equivalent of NSS) score from 2.9 to 3.3.	✓
<b>Consistent and validated pricing model</b>	The company has a clear pricing strategy and there is a consistent process in place for institutions wishing to buy and/or implement the product. The pricing model (if paid product) has been validated through existing customers (willingness to pay).	The product is offered as campus-wide licenses to institutions, with price based on number of students, plus a licensing and implementation fee.  The pricing model has been validated through existing customers in The Netherlands and UK.	✓
<b>Financial track record and longevity</b>	The company has a financial track record of at least three years and an overall business risk of moderate.  In the panel's judgment, the company is likely to have sufficient funding and revenue to support operations for a minimum period of 12 months.		✓  ✓

## Team and capacity

<b>Capacity and skills</b>	<p>In the panel's judgment, the company possesses the skills, customer empathy, and execution ability necessary to enable effective implementation, including a clear management structure. The senior management team consists of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ronald Kouvelt, CEO &amp; Founder</li> <li>• Cornelis Richter, COO</li> <li>• Edwin Flooren, CFO</li> </ul>	✓	
<b>Development planning</b>	<p>Customers are regularly engaged in product/service development activity and there is a consistent process for updates to customers on new and planned developments. Improvements to the product are made based on user feedback.</p>	<p>The company gathers student feedback via regular student panels, and app reviews. Institutional feedback and feature suggestions are gathered ad-hoc and via topic-specific conferences.</p> <p>Updates on features are provided to customers in a regular newsletter, and via a product roadmap (available on request).</p> <p>Evidence of new features based on user feedback was provided.</p>	✓
<b>Team scalability</b>	<p>The team possesses necessary skills and management structure in place for effective implementation with a minimum of two-three institutions. There is scalability planning in place for the team to meet growing capacity and support requirements. Proven track record of delivering live implementations and providing appropriate support to several institutions.</p>	<p>The company has a dedicated account manager for each of the 33 universities in The Netherlands and the UK. Contact is maintained through regular calls and on-site visits as needed. Product support is clearly defined and split between the institution and the company's service desk. The service desk is available to contact directly during working hours, and outside of that in emergencies. The Project Manager and CTO are on hand to answer support questions from institutions, as needed.</p> <p>A new office was opened in Manchester in 2019 to support UK expansion.</p>	✓

## Data and information security

\* marks minimum technical requirements

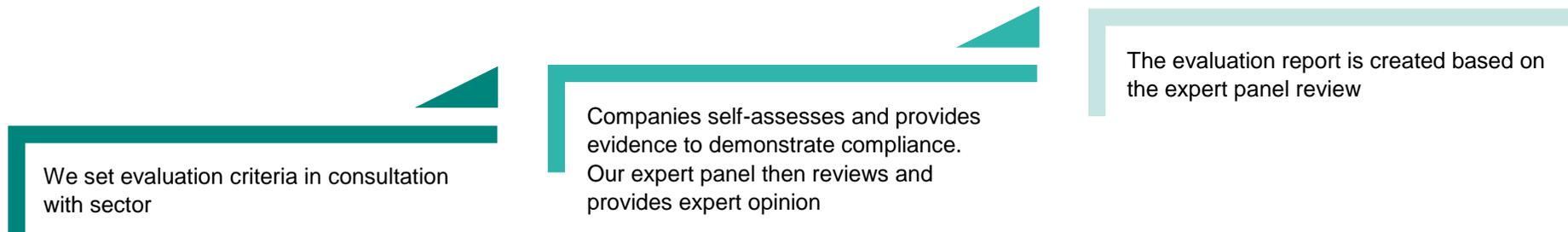
<b>Security awareness*</b>	The company follows the NSCS 10 Steps for Cyber Security guidelines, including a clear process for dealing with incidents.	✓
<b>Encryption*</b>	All data transfers across public and private networks use an encrypted method. All web traffic is over TLS, non-sensitive data. StuComm has an A rating on SSLabs.	✓
<b>Data storage*</b>	All data is stored and hosted in the Google cloud platform in The Netherlands.	✓
<b>Institutional questionnaires</b>	The company has completed some data and security questionnaires. They have provided evidence of questionnaires completed.	✓

<b>Password storage</b>	The company uses only institutional logins, and do not store user passwords. Client configuration also contains passwords and tokens. These configuration files are encrypted using Ansible. The encrypted files are stored in the company's repositories so they can automatically deploy their software.		✓
<b>Technology stack</b>	The company has provided a description of the technical stack in use.		✓
<b>Penetration testing</b>	External penetration testing has been carried out by Northwave in May 2018, and a certificate was provided. They have addressed recommendations to increase security and performance.		✓
<b>Product integration</b>			
<b>Third party systems</b>	The product has integration with required institutional systems or other systems.	Not applicable	✓
<b>Single sign-on</b>	The product can integrate with institutional single sign-on and preferably integrate with the UK Access Management Federation.	Users login to the product using their university's SSO. The company does not store passwords, they support SURFconext, Microsoft Authentication Library and LDAP(S).	✓
<b>Good practice and accessibility</b>			
<b>Source code management</b>	StuComm uses a documented custom Git Flow. A new version of backend software is released every 2 weeks, and a new version of the app is published every 6 weeks.		✓
<b>Accessibility requirements</b>	The web service meets or has a plan to meet WCAG 2.1 checklist Level AA within required timeframes.	The product does not yet fully meet WCAG 2.1 level AA standards. They provided a gaps analysis and plan to be fully compliant by September 2020.  <b>Advisory: StuComm have a plan to be WCAG 2.1 level AA compliant within the required timeframe</b>	◆
	Mobile and desktop apps (where this is relevant) take into consideration accessibility best practice.	The company takes into consideration accessibility guidelines from Apple and Android for their apps.	✓
<b>Backup requirements</b>	The company has a backup strategy, including a policy on backup retention and disaster recovery.		✓
<b>Business continuity and service resilience</b>	The company has a service resilience policy. The company uses Google Kubernetes with autoscaling of pods depending on CPU and/or memory usage.		✓
<b>Welsh language</b>			
<b>Products for use in Wales need to provide Welsh versions</b>	A statement of ability to provide a Welsh language version of any student or staff-facing products.	The product does not currently support a Welsh language version.	◆

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In undertaking this level of due diligence, we hope to reduce some of the risks institutions face when working with start-ups and increase the level of collaboration between institutions and start-ups.

### **The healthcheck process: Overview of step-up and how we assess**



Step-up is a joint initiative by Jisc and Emerge Education.

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