

In RIBI when we refer to STEP we mean Family to Family Exchanges where our student experiences what it is like to live as a member of a family in which there is another student who will hopefully have interests and a temperament compatible with those of ours.

The Exchange involves a paired arrangement where both students spend an equal amount of time - usually around 3 weeks each - in each other's home together in turn. The Exchange may be split across two school holiday periods but typically takes place over one summer with the students travelling together on the same flight from one home to the other. Usually students choose to exchange into a country in the northern hemisphere because of the similarity of the school calendar.

Typically this programme attracts students from year 11 (16+) and year 12 (17+) although some older year 10 students (15+) may also be interested if rather less easy to 'match'. Year 11 students have the best opportunity to fit in a period of six weeks. Early applicants may find that there are unforeseen obstacles to their committing a whole summer to such exchange and should be urged to make strenuous enquiries so that arrangements do not fall through. Duke of Edinburgh expeditions/ A Level or University summer courses come to mind particularly.

Most countries are ready from about December onwards to attempt a matching process and it is ideal to have the application forms ready to go as soon as possible before this. For information about different countries and their time scales see *'IN3 - Country Information'*

Applications from Abroad

Random Inbound Applications for STEP also come in from Districts and Multidistricts abroad to the Multidistrict STEP Coordinator and sometimes to individual DYEEOs. In the case of the latter these applications need to be forwarded to the Coordinator who can see all the RIBI STEP applications online and is in the position to know if we have a potential match for a particular Inbound student. This is essentially a reactive role which may produce a satisfactory outcome for some of our students. However, the main task of our Coordinator is to work proactively on behalf of our students by introducing them to colleagues abroad to countries of their choosing.

Variations in the Short Term Exchange model

There is an alternative model for STEP which many countries use (but not RIBI). Many countries, typically in the Southern hemisphere or Asia, arrange a cultural homestay experience often combined with some sort of educational course, for two students who will exchange with each other without having any intended connection (unlike our pairing arrangement). Students on this sort of exchange can be older than those whom RIBI sends out on STEP - ours are normally still of high school age - and the length of each leg of the exchange is often much longer than our three weeks. It will work where the summer holidays are longer than ours and particularly for exchanges between northern and southern hemispheres which have split exchanges. In RIBI split exchanges have not been popular as families do not want to host students in December/ January and the timing does not fit with our educational system.

When beginning a conversation about STEP with representatives of other countries it is advisable to check that you are both talking about the same model of STEP. While the model that we use works across most of the Northern hemisphere some of these countries also employ the other model as well.