



WSL Action Plan for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion 2025–2028

Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research WSL

WSL Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research SLF

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The WSL Action Plan for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion 2025–2028 is available in German and English. The German version is the original version.

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Foreword by the Executive Board

Diversity and inclusion are values that are lived out at WSL. The WSL management is committed to gender equality in all functions and at all levels, as well as to promoting an open, inclusive and healthy working environment. The cornerstones of our collaboration are mutual respect, appreciation and constructive dialogue. It is the shared responsibility of all people with leadership responsibility and employees to create an environment in which every individual can contribute their skills and actively shape WSL – free from discrimination based on gender or other individual characteristics.

All this requires targeted commitment. Gender roles and stereotypes deeply rooted in society and the resulting structural barriers are at work everywhere, including in our institution. The measures in this document therefore pursue three central goals:

- increasing the proportion of women in management positions,
- creating an inclusive working environment for all employees,
- supporting a healthy work-life balance.

This requires several key components: equality programmes, leadership development, and a comprehensive conflict management system that combines prevention with support services. Equally important is our commitment to employees' mental health, including measures to help balance professional responsibilities with caregiving roles. The strategic positioning of the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) office within the Directorate's area of responsibility reflects the central importance of DEI as a cross-cutting priority at WSL, ensuring effective implementation across the entire institution.

With this action plan, WSL can build on the successes of its Gender Action Plans, which have been in place since 2019: at the end of 2024, the proportion of women at WSL reached 40% for the first time. The final evaluation of the working situation in the ETH Domain, comprising the universities ETH Zurich and EPFL as well as the research institutions PSI, Empa, Eawag and WSL, carried out in 2024 also yielded above-average results for WSL. These results demonstrate the effectiveness of our action plans and confirm that we are on the right track.

This plan is embedded in the ETH Domain's overarching [Strategy for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion 2025–2028](#). The WSL participated in its development as a representative of the four research institutions. The WSL management supports the catalogue of measures set out in this document for implementing the ETH Domain's strategy at WSL and has made its implementation binding for the current planning period (2025–2028).

On behalf of the WSL Directorate

Rolf Holderegger

Rolf Holderegger



Introduction

This document contains measures to promote equality and inclusion at WSL, as well as indicators for measuring progress. It is divided into four chapters:

1. Inclusive culture and communication, safe environment and good management practice;
2. Recruitment process and equal opportunities in career development for women and underrepresented groups;
3. Mental health and life-domain balance;
4. Inclusive research, innovation and teaching.

The WSL DEI Action Plan 2025–2028 (DEI Action Plan) is based on the WSL Gender Action Plan 2022–2024. It therefore covers both existing activities and new projects.

The ETH Domain has committed to allocating at least 0.5% of its annual federal funding to DEI measures. When using these funds and designing and implementing its measures, WSL pays attention to diversity and balance in order to take into account the different needs of its employees.

The effectiveness of the measures is recorded using various monitoring tools. The achievement of quantitative targets, such as target values for women in management positions, is assessed annually by Human Resources and the results are published in the annual report and the diversity report. Every four years, WSL reports to the ETH Board on its DEI activities and progress in the form of a comprehensive report. Feedback on job satisfaction and equal pay analyses are carried out every five years.



1 Inclusive culture and communication, safe environment and good leadership practices

In an inclusive working environment, every person feels valued and respected for their views, ideas, perspectives and experiences.

As stated in the foreword by the WSL management, this does not happen by itself but requires the active removal of barriers and the awareness and elimination of prejudices. At a formal level, WSL therefore has guidelines in place for the prevention of and procedures for dealing with inappropriate behaviour.

1.1 Inclusive culture and communication

1.1.1 Breaking down prejudices and stereotypes

A key challenge in creating an inclusive culture is dealing with stereotypes and prejudices, known as unconscious biases. WSL continuously raises awareness of their existence and their possible effects and proactively counteracts them.

Measures	Explanation	Time	Implementation
a) Online training at Lead Campus on unconscious bias	Mandatory for all people with leadership responsibility, recommended for all employees and new employees	In force ¹ End of 2025	DEI ² and Directorate
b) Raising awareness among people with leadership responsibility through training	Part of the “Leadership in Science” course offered by the four research institutions at the FHNW	In force	HR
c) Online materials on the WSL intranet on unconscious bias	Revision of existing materials	October 2025	DEI and DC ³
d) Promotion of networks	Networks play a vital role in empowering groups affected by prejudice. WSL actively promotes such networks—for example, for the LGBTQIA+ community and first-generation academics—and ensures they have a voice in the DC.	In force or in planning	DEI
e) Guidelines for recruitment committees	Review of the recruitment guidelines, if necessary additions	By October 2025	DEI and HR

1.1.2 Inclusive language and communication

Language shapes how we think and act. WSL communicates internally in both German and English, switching to a single language only when the entire target audience can be reached that way. This inclusive approach ensures we connect with employees who are in Switzerland temporarily and may have limited German skills.

Images speak just as powerfully as words. They provide opportunities to increase the visibility of underrepresented groups. The same principle applies to how we represent ourselves externally: all employees collectively shape WSL's image, and our communications—in words, images, and the people we showcase—should reflect this diversity.

¹ In force = already being implemented

² DEI = Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Unit

³ DC = Diversity Committee



Measures	Explanation	Time frame	Implementation
a) WSL language courses	Foreign language skills promote communication and integration. At WSL, <u>subsidised language courses</u> can be booked through a partner organisation.	In force	HR
b) Language guide and visual representations	The employee handbook contains the information sheet on inclusive language, which is binding for communication at WSL.	In force	DEI and communication
c) Representation	At public events and in representative functions, care must be taken to ensure that the diversity of the workforce is adequately represented.	Ongoing	Managers, research groups

1.2 Communication of activities

In the final evaluation of the ETH Domain in 2024 mentioned in the management's foreword, WSL scored very well in terms of awareness of DEI services and contact points. We are committed to maintaining this level of performance.

Measures	Explanation	Period	Implementation
a) Intranet	Regular updates on strategy, events, networks, etc. on the intranet	In force	DEI and DC
b) Annual meetings between DEI and RU/SU leaders	Objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information from DEI - Gain insight into the challenges faced by RUs and SUs 	In force, once a year	DEI, RU, SU
c) Articles in WSLintern and use of events	Topic-specific articles in the internal employee magazine; use of major events for broad information (e.g. WSL Research Day 2025)	In force	DEI and DC
d) Newsletter	<i>Diversity News 4 RI</i> reports on DEI topics as well as successful communication and mental health.	In force, approx. four times a year	DEI 4 RI ⁴
e) Diversity Report	The <i>Diversity Report</i> provides information about the measures implemented in the previous year and the goals achieved.	End of May	DEI and DC

1.3 Safe working environment

1.3.1 Respectful interaction

Mutual respect is the cornerstone of good cooperation. WSL takes a firm stance against inappropriate behaviour and has established clear instructions, procedures and guidelines for preventing and dealing with discrimination, bullying, threats, violence and sexual harassment. The WSL Code of Respect, the conflict management system currently being redesigned and training courses promote a culture of open and respectful interaction with different views, conflicts and interpersonal challenges in the workplace.

Measures	Explanation	Time frame	Implementation
a) Handing out the Respect Code to new employees	Communicating behavioural guidelines and consequences for inappropriate behaviour	In force	HR
b) Conflict management system	Development of a concept	First half of 2026	DEI and DC with HR and GL ⁵

⁴ RI = Research institutions of the ETH Domain: PSI, Empa, Eawag, WSL

⁵ GL = Executive Board (Geschäftsleitung)



Measures	Explanation	Time frame	Implementation
c) WSL-wide training on feedback and addressing difficult topics	Development of a concept and implementation	Late summer 2026 to spring 2027	DEI and DC with HR

1.3.2 Confidential contact points

WSL has easily accessible confidential contact points for all employees. Our contact points act effectively and promptly while safeguarding the procedural rights of all parties involved.

Measures	Explanation	Period	Implementation
a) Regular communication of services	Via mailings, intranet tiles, poster campaign, presentation of offers in RU and SU	In force	WSL Trust and Ombudsperson
b) Evaluation of counselling services	An ad hoc group is developing a concept for evaluating the services.	Mid-2026	Ad hoc group
c) Further training	In order to maintain and improve the quality and professionalism of counselling, counsellors receive regular further training.	In force	HR and line managers ⁶
d) Exchange between contact points of the 4 RI	Once a year, the counsellors from the 4 RI meet to exchange experiences.	Start Autumn 2025	WSL Confidential advisor and ombudsperson

1.4 Good management practice

WSL promotes management approaches that encourage employees to contribute their views, thoughts and ideas in a cooperative manner. All people in leadership positions receive regular training in their supervisory duties and are supported by management development measures to create an inclusive culture and be aware of their role as role models. These measures may include courses, coaching, peer events and similar activities.

Measures	Explanation	Time frame	Implementation
a) Leadership training	Communication, conflict resolution, motivation and self-management are key skills that leaders can learn.	In force	- Course: Leadership in Science FHNW ⁷ - Lead Campus - WSL Conference
b) Consulting	If you have any questions about inclusive leadership culture, HR advisors and the DEI officer are available to provide advice. <u>Lead Campus</u> offers "case discussions for supervisors".	In force	HR, DEI and Lead Campus
c) Leadership principles	Development of WSL's leadership principles	December 2026	HR and Management
d) Communication and conduct during field assignments	Further awareness-raising on the topic and consultation	In force	DEI and DC

⁶ Line manager: Group or head of research or specialist units (RU / SU)

⁷ FHNW = University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland



2 Recruitment process and equal opportunities in career development for women and underrepresented groups

Swiss law enshrines the promotion of women's careers and the inclusion of people with disabilities through the Gender Equality Act (GEA) and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Building on this legal foundation, the ETH Board has set the goal of raising awareness about the needs of underrepresented groups and supporting first-generation academics.

Chapters 2.1 and 2.2 stem from WSL's target agreement with the ETH Board and are designed to advance women's careers in the natural sciences. As the Executive Board notes in its foreword, we have made significant progress, but intentional support for women in the natural sciences remains crucial.⁸

2.1 Increasing the proportion of women in the recruitment process

Increasing the proportion of women, especially in permanent positions and in management positions, is one of the WSL's goals. The WSL aims to achieve a proportion of at least 50% women in new scientific appointments (scientific and technical staff) for the period 2025–2028. By 2028, the proportion of women in function levels 10 to 15 is to rise from the current 30% to at least 34%.⁹ In its current planning period, WSL is aligning itself with the categories used by the ETH Domain, which cover all positions in salary grades 10 to 15, whereas previous targets and monitoring only referred to management positions with line responsibility. A more balanced gender distribution is also being sought in the specialist units. To this end, WSL ensures framework conditions and process standards in its personnel policy.

Measures	Explanation	Period	Implementa-tion
a) Recruitment with selection committees for positions in RU ¹⁰ at the level of scientific or technical staff with a contract duration of more than one year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consisting of at least four people, two women and two men - In larger committees, both genders must be represented by at least 40% - HR staff are part of the selection committee - The equal opportunities officer may be consulted - At least one person of the underrepresented gender from the relevant field - Special cases and exceptions must be justified to the management 	In force	Recruiters, HR
b) Equal opportunity recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brochure with guidelines and tips on recruitment (HR) - Information on dealing with unconscious bias - No option to upload a photo in the recruitment tool - Consideration of non-linear career paths – selection committees take appropriate account of the impact of part-time employment and extended absences on professional performance records¹¹ 	In force	HR DEI
c) Search and selection of candidates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The shortlist of candidates must include at least one woman and one man. - Suitable candidates of both genders shall be invited to interviews. 	In force	Recruiters HR

⁸ Sections 2.1 and 2.2 focus on promoting women's careers. WSL recognizes, however, that gender is not strictly binary and that this binary framework fails to reflect the full spectrum of biological and social identities. This understanding drives WSL's active support of the LGBTQIA+ network.

⁹ This was agreed in the target agreement with the ETH Board for the 2025 to 2028 planning period. Given the limited number of positions becoming available due to retirements, this target is quite ambitious.

¹⁰ RU = Research Unit(s)

¹¹ This also includes maternity leave, parental leave, military service, etc.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special cases and exceptions must be justified to the Executive Board. - When advertising management positions in particular, other channels should be used at an early stage in addition to the usual recruitment channels, e.g. social media, networks, associations, former employees, direct approaches, etc. 		
d) Openness to job sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the case of job sharing, it is possible to increase the workload to 120% for management positions in individual cases. - No job sharing for persons who have a close personal relationship with each other. 	In force	Recruiters HR
e) Dual career couples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When filling RU management positions, WSL considers employment opportunities for partners within the ETH Domain. 	In force	HR
f) Balanced representation in the Executive Board and other committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When members of the Executive Board or other committees leave, the aim is to appoint candidates of the underrepresented gender. - This also applies to newly established commissions. 	In force	Executive Board and committees

2.2 Measures to promote women's careers

This package of measures focuses on transitions between academic career stages. Mentoring, training and coaching services are offered to support female scientific and technical staff in particular. Where appropriate, these measures are available to all WSL employees.

Measures	Explanation	Period	Implementation
a) Internal promotion of women in management positions through the development of leadership skills	Managers ensure that they support potentially eligible female employees in developing leadership skills so that they have opportunities to apply for management positions when they are advertised.	In force	Consulting: HR and DEI
b) "Foster. Lead. Promote." (FLP) Career advancement programme for women in science	FLP offers courses, coaching, individual mentoring and promotes peer mentoring groups for female PhDs and postdocs. WSL sits on the steering committee of this ETH Domain programme.	In force	DEI
c) feM-LEAD – Mentoring programme for women interested in leadership roles	feM-LEAD offers all women at WSL the opportunity to explore the topic of leadership with a mentor. PhDs and postdocs with access to FLP are excluded. WSL has a seat on the steering committee of this programme of the 4 RI of the ETH Domain.	In force	DEI
d) CONNECT – Connecting Women's Careers in Academia and Industry	CONNECT supports networking between women in research and the private and public sectors. WSL is a member of the steering committee for this programme run by the ETH Domain and other institutions.	In force	DEI



2.3 Equal opportunities for underrepresented groups

As an institution of the ETH Domain, WSL is committed to creating an inclusive culture at all levels in order to attract a diverse workforce and enable them to develop and perform at their best.

Measures	Explanation	Period	Implementation
a) Further training at all functional and age levels	Managers actively inform employees of all genders about opportunities for further training and development at all functional and age levels Examples: Development of technical and interdisciplinary skills; management courses, sabbaticals, mentoring programmes, professional networks; specific aspects such as management courses for women or opportunities for first-generation academics	In force	Consulting: HR and DEI
b) Offers from the WSL DEI Office	For topics not covered by the Foster. Lead.Promote (FLP; ETH Domain) programme, WSL can offer internal workshops and training courses in the area of equal opportunities and diversity promotion.	In force	DEI
c) Promotion of an inclusive organisational culture, contact points and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear commitment by WSL against discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment (see 1.3.1) - Dissemination of knowledge about unconscious bias and psychological safety in the workplace - Low-threshold system of counselling and contact points and networks 	In force	DEI and HR
d) People with disabilities – consideration of special workplace and communication requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - e.g. for people receiving disability benefits, in work trials or other reintegration programmes - People with chronic illnesses - People with neurodiversities 	In force	HR
e) People with impairments – awareness workshops	Workshops with specialist organisations to raise awareness at WSL of the situation of people with neurodivergences, disabilities or chronic illnesses	2026	DEI
f) People with disabilities – Development of an intranet platform	- Objective: Information transfer, awareness raising and knowledge building	Winter	DEI
g) Equal opportunities for people from all social backgrounds – offers for first-generation academics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targeted support for integration into the scientific community and for establishing professional contacts - Cooperation with Eawag, which is a member of the “First Gen+” network of Swiss universities (PG7 project)¹² 	2026-2028	DEI and leaders

¹² Project-related contributions (PgB) P-7 “Diversity, inclusion and equal opportunities in higher education development” from Swissuniversities

3 Mental health and life-domain balance

The aim of the measures in this area is to use framework conditions and support instruments to ensure that people of all genders can balance their studies, careers and private lives.

Measures	Explanation	Period	Implementation
a) Courses on work-life balance	Lead Campus offers various courses on resilience, time management and career planning	In force	Lead Campus
b) Impulse workshops at SLF ¹³	1.5-hour workshops encourage discussion of topics such as communication and conflict management as well as mental health and exchange across research and specialist groups.	Planning until September 2025, start November 2025	DEI
c) Information events on mental health, dealing with chronic illnesses and neural diversity in the workplace	In collaboration with the Competence Centre Diversity & Inclusion (CCDI) at PSI, mostly or entirely online	From 2026	CCDI, DEI, DC
d) Family support for postdocs Option A	To enable employees to fulfil childcare responsibilities, the employment level can be reduced to 60–80% for up to one year and an extension of the employment contract to up to 120% can be requested. Example: two years at 60% instead of one year at 100%.	Ongoing, in force	PIs and HR
e) Family support for postdocs Option B	Upon request, the reduced employment level can be partially compensated for one year, e.g. with a technician or a student assistant. The total employment level of 120% is achieved by combining the individual employment levels accordingly (e.g. 60%/60%).	In force	PIs, management, HR
f) Flexibility in workload	In general, WSL advertises positions with a level of employment of 80 to 100%. Where possible, job advertisements should indicate flexibility in terms of workload.	In force	PIs and HR
g) Social hardship cases	WSL employees with childcare responsibilities can apply to the social fund for a contribution towards childcare costs in proven cases of social hardship.	In force	HR
h) Work-life balance coaching	Free coaching sessions for employees with care responsibilities (children, parents, partners, etc.) with the Fachstelle UND .	In force	DEI
i) Childcare activities during the holiday season with kihz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WSL subsidises the summer camp in Birmensdorf for its employees. In addition, WSL employees can take advantage of other holiday care services offered by kihz. - WSL pays employees at its Davos, Cadenazzo and Lausanne sites a subsidy per child per year for one week of holiday childcare. 	In force	WSL events
j) Breastfeeding and relaxation room	A breastfeeding and relaxation room for parents and children has been set up in both Birmensdorf and Davos. When the rooms are not being used for family purposes, they also serve as a relaxation room.	In force	DEI

¹³ As there are fewer opportunities at the SLF, the journey to Birmensdorf is long and the diversity coordinator is in Davos about once a month, this opportunity is being used to offer short workshops.

4 Inclusive research, innovation and teaching

The WSL recommends specific measures in appropriate areas to promote the integration of diversity and, in particular, gender aspects in research projects and programmes. It supports critical discussions, the exchange of experiences and translational research in the development of such research methods and innovations. It actively participates in the exchange of experiences within the ETH Domain on these topics.

Measures	Explanation	Period	Implementation
a) Recommendation to consider DEI issues in environmental research	This may relate to methods, objectives, type of co-operation, organisations involved, etc. ¹⁴	Ongoing	PIs, group leaders and RU leaders
b) Support for early career scientists (ECS) as PIs in internal projects	Applications for internal WSL projects can be beneficial for researchers in the early stages of their careers	Ongoing	PIs, group leaders and RU leaders
c) Training for practitioners on WSL topics	Care should be taken to ensure that content is communicated in a manner that is sensitive to diversity and gender equality. Different perspectives and application contexts should be taken into account both in the choice of methods and in the case studies.	Ongoing	PIs, group and RU leaders
d) Scientific conferences and events	At scientific conferences and events at WSL, care should be taken to ensure that the proportion of women among the invited speakers is balanced (40 to 60%). It is recommended that the ETH checklist for diversity-sensitive events be consulted during planning.	Ongoing	Organiser or group of organisers
e) GRP Alliance	WSL is a member of the Swiss Alliance for Global Research Partnerships of SCNAT.	In force	Josaine Dingler and DEI

¹⁴ For cooperation, particularly in cross-border partnerships, see, for example, SCNAT [AQ guidelines for cross-border research partnerships – 11 principles](#). [Spirit Grants](#) from the SNF can also be a valuable tool for establishing sustainable and equitable research collaborations between Switzerland and low- and middle-income countries.



List of abbreviations

- DC = Diversity Committee
- DEI = Diversity, Equality, Inclusion
- SU = Specialist units
- RU = Research units
- FHNW = University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland
- GL = Executive Board
- HR = Human Resources
- RI = Research Institution

Glossary

In this action plan, **diversity and inclusion are inseparable**. Both concepts center on creating work, social, and learning environments that genuinely recognize and value the different characteristics, perspectives, and experiences people bring from their varied backgrounds.

Diversity encompasses socially significant similarities and differences among people, including gender, sexual orientation and identity, socio-economic and ethnic background, migration history, nationality, language, religion, culture, neurodiversity, age, and physical and mental abilities. True diversity means not only recognizing these dimensions but valuing them within a framework of equal participation.¹⁵

Inclusion means creating an environment in which different people feel respected, valued and empowered to fully participate and contribute. It goes beyond the mere recognition of diversity and strives to create a sense of belonging. This means actively removing barriers, prejudices and discrimination in order to ensure equal opportunities and equal access to resources and decision-making processes.

Equality and equal opportunities refer to the principles of human rights and the constitutional mandate entrusted to the institutions of the ETH Domain, in particular with regard to gender equality and the equality of people with disabilities. All institutions of the ETH Domain are committed to equality at all qualification levels and in all areas of research, research support and student life.

Equal opportunities are a key criterion for quality and excellence. Equality also means taking specific needs and existing inequalities into account and, as a result, deriving targeted measures to ensure equal opportunities.

Intersectional diversity refers to multiple interconnected social categorisations based on origin and skin colour, so-called social strata and classes, gender, etc., which can lead to overlapping and interdependent experiences of discrimination or disadvantage. This clearly shows that members of specific groups are not all the same and that, even though they often face similar challenges and have comparable experiences, they cannot be reduced to a single category.

Life domain balance refers to a balanced arrangement of different areas of life such as work, family, health, personal development and social activities. In contrast to work-life balance, it recognises the interdependence of all areas of life and strives for a dynamic balance that can be adapted to different stages of life. The aim is sustainable well-being through appropriate attention to all important dimensions of life.

Neurodiversity describes the natural variation in neurological differences such as ADHD, autism or dyslexia as human diversity rather than deficits. This applies to the areas of information processing, perception and communication. In practice, this means understanding neurodiverse perspectives as an enrichment and breaking down barriers as far as possible. The goal is to include neurodiverse people in the work culture while taking their special needs into account.

A **stereotype** is a widespread and simplified image or set of images of a particular group of people. Stereotypes are often based on assumptions, generalisations or preconceived opinions rather than

¹⁵ See definition in swissuniversities P-7, Diversity, Inclusion and Equal Opportunities in Higher Education Development (2021–24).



accurate or nuanced information. They can encompass various characteristics such as traits, behaviours, roles or personality traits that are attributed to members of the group. Stereotypes can be positive, negative or neutral, and they can lead to prejudice and inappropriate judgements. Although some stereotypes contain elements of truth, they can be harmful when applied without consideration for individual differences and diversity within the group.

Unconscious biases are attitudes, beliefs or stereotypes that influence our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious or automatic way. This can make them difficult to identify and deal with. They can influence how we perceive and relate to others and how we make judgements or decisions, often leading to unintentional discrimination or unfair treatment. These biases can relate to gender, age, origin, socio-economic background and many other characteristics, and are often rooted in personal, social or cultural experiences.

Underrepresented groups are groups that (historically) have a relatively low proportion within the ETH Domain. A comparison with the general population can indicate whether a group is underrepresented. However, underrepresentation is always context-specific; it can vary between different institutions, scientific fields, functions, etc., and have different causes. For example, women in STEM subjects or first-generation academics can be considered underrepresented groups in the ETH Domain. The institutions of the ETH Domain can define what underrepresentation means in their specific context and how they take it into account in their own strategies and action plans.

STEM is an acronym for the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.