



## **Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)**

### **Follow-up Report to the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)**

**September 2020**

#### **Preface**

One year after publication of their ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports, institutions are asked to submit a Follow-up Report to QAA Scotland. These reports are also submitted to the Scottish Funding Council. Follow-up Reports are written in the institution's own words and require to be endorsed by the institution's Governing Body prior to publication on the QAA website. Guidance on the content and structure is provided by QAA Scotland.

Institutions are asked to focus on the action they have taken since the review and to include an indication of the effectiveness of that action. ELIR reports highlight positive practice as well as areas for development, and institutions are encouraged to comment on key areas of activity relating to good practice that they have prioritised since the ELIR.

Follow-up Reports are discussed with institutions as part of the ELIR annual discussion meetings.

## SRUC

### Year-on Response to the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR)

September 2020

#### 1. Introduction

##### Purpose of the report

The purpose of the report is to provide an overview on the actions that SRUC has taken a year on from the May 2019 Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR). SRUC engaged fully in the process of ELIR since the benefits now and in the future are clear – the peer led process was helpful in identifying both areas of good practice and areas where SRUC can improve and enhance the student experience.

The recommendations made through the ELIR process have been taken forward, under the governance of the SRUC Academic Board. In response to ELIR, an action plan was drawn up to address the recommendations and these will be addressed individually in this report. Additionally, commendations will be commented upon and further, a narrative is provided to give an update on SRUC's strategic development.

It is prudent to mention that the period from March 2020 to the present has been dominated by COVID19, and the requirement to ensure that wherever possible students at SRUC, at all SCQF levels, had the opportunity to complete their qualifications was prioritised. We believe SRUC were extremely successful in this.

#### 2. Outcome of SRUC ELIR 2019

##### 2.1 SRUC ELIR 4 2019

SRUC participated in ELIR 4 in Spring 2019. The ELIR Outcome Report confirms that SRUC has 'effective arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience'. This was an improvement on SRUC's ELIR 3 outcome in 2014 where the effective outcome was caveated by the requirement for SRUC to improve academic dialogue at all levels and in particular at institutional level. The outcome from ELIR 4 commended SRUC for several of areas of good practice (see section 5) covering our **approach to mental health awareness and support, supporting individual student journeys, communicating with staff and academic staff development**. SRUC also received seven recommendations to address (see section 4). These covered **effective use of academic committee structures, distance learning student experience, preparation for teaching, responding to student views, feedback to students on assessed work, using data to enhance the student experience and careers advice**.

##### 2.2 SRUC approach to following-up outcomes from ELIR 4

The outcome report was considered by the SRUC Academic Board, Academic Leadership Team and Learning and Teaching Committee. SRUC colleagues and students were involved in the action planning to address the recommendations, and ownership of progress in addressing the Action Plan sits with the SRUC Academic Board, chaired by the Academic Director. Academic Board is the highest-level Academic Governance Committee consisting of Senior Academic Leaders including Heads of Department, and elected staff and student members, from the SRUC Students' Association (SRUCSA).

This one year on follow up report was considered and agreed out of Committee by the SRUC Academic Board in September 2020 and was endorsed at the meeting of the SRUC Board on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 2020.

### **3. Update on SRUC Strategy and Priorities**

#### **3.1 SRUC Mission and Vision**

As previously noted, although 2020 has been significantly impacted by COVID 19 up to this point, this has also given SRUC the opportunity to refresh and update its strategy which has been shared internally and externally with stakeholders through the 'Unified' campaign ([link](#)). There is a strong ambition and belief that SRUC, through its position with Government and Business, can drive innovation and system-change through our connections, networks and impactful relationships and through this, positively tackle the 'wicked challenges' we face as a society.

#### **Anchored locally, impacting globally**

**SRUC's Vision:** Scotland's enterprise university at the heart of our sustainable natural economy.

**Mission:** Creating and mobilising knowledge and talent. Partnering locally and globally to benefit Scotland's natural economy.

**The natural economy:** an economy fuelled by responsible use of our natural resources: people, land, energy, water, animals and plants. An interlinked, shared, living system that creates opportunities and prosperity. It is multi-scale, dynamic and resilient through creative management and mindful custodianship.

**The global wicked challenges:** The wicked challenges are some of the most difficult and complex we face as a society. Linked to the Sustainable Development Goals they are multi-faceted and are about a new relationship with our planet and may need new ways of looking at the economy.

#### **3.2 Degree Awarding Powers**

SRUC remains ambitious to achieve Taught and Research Degree Awarding Powers. Following the outcome of ELIR 4, internal developmental work, and the input of external consultants (Advance HE), a proposal was considered by Academic Board (March 2020), which was subsequently endorsed by the SRUC Board to take a phased approach to the

application process. Due to the relative autonomy SRUC has from both validating Universities (Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh), the primary focus will be on achieving taught degree awarding powers (TDAP), whilst further development is made on the policies and processes which underpin our long and successful history as research degree managers and supervisors.

The current timeline is that the application for TDAP will be drafted during Autumn and Winter of 2020/21 with the intention of submitting April 2021.

### **3.3 Digital Strategy**

SRUC recognise that everyone will need enhanced digital skills and capabilities in the future. SRUC made the decision at the end of 2019 to enhance the focus on our Digital Strategy. There are several strands to the activity and significant investment is already underway. SRUC will develop a *digital by default* policy: digital innovation will be considered as part of a critical process at point of design, to ensure digitally enhanced delivery of services including academic delivery and the student experience. SRUC recognises that colleagues will be the key to improved digital outcomes and not the technology, though access to digital technology for all our learners and stakeholders is being enhanced.

We are focussing on supporting and developing digital intelligence: the confidence in using and exploiting technology and the ability to create new technology itself. We are supporting our staff in the culture change this agile way of working will bring by providing professional learning opportunities to allow them to make effective use of digital technology, to ascertain current levels of capability to focus development, and to be comfortable in experimenting with digital innovations. We will monitor how this will facilitate our students to have an enriched learning experience and to develop their digital skills and capabilities. It will also augment our engagement with other stakeholders, enhance our research capabilities and develop our capability to commercially utilise data and digital services.

### **3.4 Faculty and Curriculum Development**

SRUC's academic strategy is that:

- SRUC is clearly identified as Scotland's National Institution for integrated research, teaching, and consultancy to support the natural economy.
- SRUC students have the required skills to grow the natural economy in Scotland and globally.
- Through global alliances, SRUC provides leadership in collaborative, international research and educational partnerships that tackle global challenges.
- SRUC provides an inspiring work environment where staff and students realise their full potential.

#### **Domains**

Our teaching and research are based around the following domains/faculties. Whilst initially (and at the time of ELIR 4) based on geography our faculties are evolving to cover distinct domains of academic activity.

**Planetary health:** This faculty focuses on supporting a healthy, sustainable and profitable rural sector. It aims to drive the development of diverse agricultural and aquatic systems and their supply chains while championing the unique landscapes, wildlife and the conservation features that they encompass; all of which underpin our vibrant food and tourism industries. It aims to provide a focus for rural veterinary training by developing a model that will both support rural Scotland during a period of disruption while developing cohorts of students who will have the holistic skill sets to allow them to thrive within such an environment.

**Circular economy:** This faculty concentrates on driving a sustainable circular and carbon-clever existence, focusing on dairy and other ruminant grassland-based systems, forestry, and biorefining. It aims to operate in partnership with producers and support agencies, such as South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) and Growth Deals, to be responsive to and anticipate future sector needs. It aims to create strong articulation pathways with appropriate further education (FE) and higher education (HE) providers in the South and West of Scotland to provide ready access to flexible tertiary education provision. As well as supporting traditional skills, it will ensure the sectors it serves are equipped for the fourth industrial revolution and the ongoing economic, biodiversity and climate crises, embedding digital innovations and sustainability within its academic operations. Its learning and teaching will be agile, adapting to rapidly changing needs, and will facilitate students' own agility, ensuring they are able to proactively plan for, and be responsive to, the ever-changing worlds in which they work.

**Science society and Business:** This faculty serves Scotland's main population centres in the Central belt including the major cities, and the urban interface. It focuses on the underpinning natural and social sciences that drive the rural economy and a strong focus on informing and interpreting policy as it relates to the rural environment and food production. It aims to work with sector bodies to develop professionalization of the sector and focus on supporting entrepreneurial activity in both the student body and the commercial sector.

#### **4. Response to ELIR 4 2019 recommendations**

**4.1 Effective use of academic committee structures** - *use the opportunity provided by recent changes to the academic governance and committee structure to review the balance of responsibilities and accountability between the academic committees and operational structures. In doing so, ensure there can be an informed debate on key academic matters relating to learning and teaching and the wider student experience.*

At the time of ELIR 4, the Academic Governance structure had been newly updated to take account of the new faculty structure (see section 3.4). There was also a requirement to update membership of Academic Board in accordance with the provisions of the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016. Elections for the expanded complement of staff representatives have been undertaken and from Academic Year 2019/20 have met as the enlarged group, in line with legislation.

The Head of Learning and Teaching has undertaken work with SRUCSA and the Board to devise and implement rules for the election of student representatives which have now also been implemented.

The Academic Governance Committees, including the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Programme Approval and Academic Standards Committee are now meeting with Chairs in place following new appointments. SRUC's new Doctoral College, reporting to Research Committee and through to Academic Board, is being established.

Although the Committees are in place and operational, we have run the committees fully for AY 2019/20 with the intention of judging effectiveness and appropriateness of remit and membership. From this, in Autumn 2020 we will review the role and remit of three of the sub committees (Programme Approvals and Academic Standards Committee, Student Support and Engagement Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee) - in line with the new structures for Registry, the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT), Doctoral College and the faculty Offices.

A governance handbook has been drafted - covering Corporate Governance, Academic Governance and Leadership Team remits giving all SRUC stakeholders an overview of governance at SRUC. This cannot be finalised until the completion of the review of the sub-committees but is scheduled for publication early 2021.

**4.2 Distance learning student experience** - *review the needs and experience of students studying by distance learning to ensure they are effectively supported. This review should include consideration of SRUC's pedagogical approach for distance learning, setting minimum expectations for online materials, student induction, IT support, library access, and the use of video conferencing.*

A multi-year project led by the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) and reporting to Student Support and Engagement Committee is being implemented to improve the experience for staff and students. Initial work focussed on the development of a standard operating procedure for the monitoring of distance learning student progress and was released in academic year 2019/20.

SRUC is a member of Land-based Colleges working towards excellence (Landex) and the focus of SRUC's annual review from Landex (February 2020) was our Distance Learning Staff and Student Experience. A range of recommendations has resulted from this review, many of which have been identified as good practice for all learning modes. As such, implementation of actions following the review are being incorporated into broader blended learning plans for 2020/21, particularly around the development of Moodle, SRUC's virtual learning environment (VLE), and the roll out of Digital Learning staff development

Operationally, the COVID 19 pandemic in AY 2019/20 necessitated a mass pivot to online learning and assessment, with considerable investment taking place to ensure all student's experience was as positive as it could be, including in our digital infrastructure, lecture

capture, use of drones and 360 cameras, chatbots and software to improve remote engagement in library services.

One major area of development centred around Moodle. Developments included emergency investment in Big Blue Button (to record live remote teaching – identification of Kaltura as the most effective lecture capture system in late 2019/20, following an extensive procurement exercise, will mean a phase out of Big Blue Button from 2021/22) and integration of Office 365 in Moodle.

Moodle has been upgraded with a new – more effective – theme implemented. Colleagues have been supported throughout this process by CELT. The Centre delivered a six-week intensive staff development programme in August/September 2020, which was designed to support the enhanced use of Moodle and enable staff to create active blended learning materials for students. This programme was archived for future use. Staff also have access to a “Getting the Best out of Moodle” resource, developed by CELT, which provides a one-stop shop for guidance, tips, case studies and training on how to get the best out of the virtual learning environment.

SRUC developed safeguarding procedures in Spring 2020 to protect students and colleagues in an online environment and also utilised a remote proctoring service in May 2020 to facilitate students with PSRB requirements to undertake their exams online. While focused on our Vet Nursing students in 2019/20, the use of remote proctoring will be offered across SRUC in future years to support robust, remote examination-based assessments where appropriate.

Going forward, mechanisms to provide parity of access to student support services and enable the effective capture of student feedback from distance learning students will be a key area for consideration as part of the project. As part of this, the Students’ Association are in the process of reworking their physically-located Campus Councils into faculty-based, remote Student Panels for Academic Year 2020/21– which aim to be representative of all students, no matter the mode, level or location of learning.

**4.3 Preparation for teaching** - *establish a clear policy which outlines institutional expectations for the training that all staff and students must complete before undertaking teaching and/or assessment responsibilities.*

Prior to teaching, all staff and/or students undertaking teaching and/or assessment responsibilities (including instructors and demonstrators) will be required to undertake ‘New to Teaching’ academic development. A New to Teaching Day was piloted in January 2020, which focused on introducing i) Scotland’s Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework and requirements, ii) SRUC’s Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy 2020-25, iii) Fundamentals of Good Teaching, iv) SRUC’s Digital Learning Environments and Support, and v) Student Engagement in Learning and Teaching.

A May session was cancelled due to Covid, and the development activities are in the process of being converted into an interactive online module. By moving the development activities online (for roll out in Academic Year 2020/21), all staff and students will be able to undertake the module regardless of location, work patterns, or start dates.

Once started teaching, SRUC staff are expected – if they have not already – to have completed a relevant teaching qualification (Professional Development Award in Learning and Teaching + Teaching Qualification in Further Education / PGCert / L&D 9DI/L&D11) and/or to have gained recognition for their commitment to learning, teaching and the student experience (Fellowship of Advance HE). We have increased our budget to support this and have more than doubled the number of staff undertaking such qualifications in 2019/20. A Memorandum of Understanding is in the sign off stage which formalises arrangements with UHI in relation to the PGCert.

During the Summer of 2019/20, a small life working group was formed to create a SRUC-specific code of practice for Postgraduate Teaching Assistants (PGTA). This is in its final stages of completion. As part of this handbook, PGTA's will be required to undertake the New to Teaching online module prior to commencing teaching and the SRUC-delivered PDA in Learning and Teaching while undertaking teaching and assessment duties. If PGTA's are undertaking extensive teaching (more than 120 hours per year), then they will be eligible to apply for a SRUC-funded place on UHI's PGCert in Tertiary and Higher Education.

While some of these activities have been delayed owing to Covid-19, it is anticipated that they will be brought together into an overarching policy by December 2020.

**4.4 Responding to student views** - *review the current arrangements for analysing and responding to student views to ensure there is greater institutional oversight of responses with co-ordinated action being taken. This would enable SRUC to ensure changes are communicated effectively to students in a timely manner.*

There is a dual focus to this activity: to improve communication regarding how SRUC responds to student views and to maximise impact from student feedback for students. In tandem with the actions listed, regular fortnightly meetings are in place between the SRUCSA sabbatical officers and the Principal and Academic Director of SRUC.

As part of the SRUC service review, which was underway at the time of ELIR 4 two new posts have been created which have Student Voice within their remit: Academic Enhancement Lead (Student Journey) and Academic Enhancement Officer (Student Journey). These posts will have oversight of how SRUC responds to student views on an institutional level. The Student Journey Officer joined CELT in May 2020 – this postholder will be undertaking a mapping of student voice activities during 2020/21, which will include a review of both foci. It is anticipated that recommendations from this mapping/review exercise will be implemented before the end of 2020/21.

SRUCSA and SRUC continue to focus on responding to the student voice through a dedicated Student Partnership Agreement project.



There is a further requirement to develop a project to highlight the high-quality work being undertaken, for example, there have been significant revisions to both the induction survey (now integrated in to the marketing survey) and the SRUC student survey and we plan to pull all key data together into a data hub for the annual monitoring process at the end of Academic Year 2020/21

It has also been agreed that the SRUC Communications team should be more involved with communication to SRUC students and as a result communication is now much more involved in student voice related projects. This has been extremely important in the period since March 2020 when regular focussed communication has been required to ensure all SRUC students were kept fully informed during the COVID 19 lockdown. The SRUC Students' Association (SRUCSA) ran a COVID related speak week in May 2020 with several recommendations coming from it which are being implemented.

**4.5 Feedback to students on assessed work** – *conclude the work currently underway to ensure there is greater consistency in the timeliness of assessment feedback provided to students, in accordance with SRUC policy.*

A four-strand project is being implemented to address this, with oversight at Executive Level. The project is ongoing and there is a strong focus on SRUC faculty colleagues to ensure timeliness and turnaround of assessment feedback, in line with SRUC policy.

First, during 2019/20, our programme validation and revalidation process was reviewed and refreshed. This was led by the Head of Learning and Teaching, reporting to Programme Approvals and Academic Standards Committee. More attention is now placed on constructive alignment and purposeful assessment planning, with a specific requirement to produce curriculum maps and assessment blueprints. This will enable programme teams at point of design to ensure effective assessment and feedback design, enabling effective and timely feedback turnaround.

Second, is staff development: in 2019/20 this focused on what makes good assessment and feedback. Clinics with specific programme teams have been undertaken and assessment has been a focus of Institution-led Review and Revalidation activities. Effective assessment and feedback will continue to be an ongoing staff development theme for SRUC, as well as a focus of learning design activities during Review and Revalidation, ensuring all staff are updated according to emerging good practice.

The third strand is through internal monitoring. Although we have seen an improvement (evidenced through internal monitoring) in timeliness of exam result release, we have not monitored in-module assessment resulting. A group, led by the Head of Information and Digital Services, has now been set up to examine how exception reporting can be utilised through our systems (UnitE and Moodle/Grademark) to determine compliance. This will be underpinned by detailed assessment schedules being produced by Programme teams and being monitored by Heads of Department. Heads of Department will report to the Academic Director on their actions to address feedback timeliness on a monthly basis. This will be reviewed at the end of 2020/21 to ascertain effectiveness of approach.

Finally, although Registry reviewed procedures for all undergraduate (years one to four) and taught postgraduate written assessments and reduced the requirement for moderation from all to a sample, it has not had the desired impact. A root and branch review (co-developed with learners and colleagues) of assessment and feedback policies and practices will begin in September 2020, in line with the new Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy 2020-2025. This will be led by the Head of Learning and Teaching, reporting to Learning and Teaching Committee. The review will take place in Autumn/Winter 2020/2021 for implementation of changes in Spring 2021, ready for the 2021/22 academic year.

**4.6 Using data to enhance the student experience** – *recognising the progress made in improving business information, continue to enhance the range of data sets produced, analysed and reported on, ensuring this evidence informs monitoring and decision-making on all aspects of academic quality including enhancing the student experience. There would be considerable value in SRUC working with its awarding institutions to ensure the institution has access to management data, particularly that related to its postgraduate research students.*

Again, there are several strands to our approach to addressing this recommendation. Improving availability of live data has been a key priority for SRUC. The organisational restructure to form Registry and additional appointments into Information and Digital Systems (IDS) have aided this. Data reporting for the end of academic year 2019/20 and going forward are now live reports from UnitE which show three-year trend data of SRUC's key performance indicators. Additionally, in the time period since ELIR, admissions reporting has been automated and on-going modelling of predicted intake been completed. Allied to this has been the development of the SRUC data hub. Although the project is ongoing (at beta testing stage at the time of writing this report), SRUC's Business Intelligence team have developed a new SRUC Data Hub dashboard. This dashboard is designed to support SRUC's strategic goal of becoming a data driven organisation by providing colleagues with quick insights into the financial position of their cost centres.

UnitE, the SRUC Education Management information system has been confirmed as the management information system for the next 5 years. As part of the contractual extension we have further invested in the product – extending our licenses to cover resource manager and attendance management as well as staff and student advantage. This increased functionality will be implemented in the period October 2020 to July 2021. This will bring timetabling and student attendance into UnitE. This, with improved reporting through advantage will give SRUC an enhanced data set for both staff and student utilisation.

Through engagement with the SRUC Enhancement theme, work was undertaken in March-August 2020 to evaluate progress relating to the revised data sets for annual monitoring. This work was led by two student interns who reported on their evaluation on the 1 September 2020. Recommendations from the report will be implemented in 2020/21.

Appointment of a data-competent administrator within CELT, alongside the Student Journey Officer, has resulted in more comprehensive and accessible reporting of survey data, including the Graduate Outcomes Survey and the National Student Survey. Feedback from users of these reports (including Heads of Department, Programme Leaders and Marketing colleagues), have reflected their ease of use and effectiveness in supporting evidence-informed decision-making.

Future work, beyond implementation of the enhanced suite of UnitE functionality, will consider student engagement with data i.e. what data is provided to students and how we support students to engage with the data effectively both at the level of the Student Association and the wider student body (including FE and HE students).

One aspect of this is the Curriculum Mapping project. A subgroup has been formed to explore the feasibility of developing a Curriculum Mapping and Assessment Blueprint tool (moving the previously mentioned curriculum map/assessment blueprint which is in excel into a more intuitive piece of software). The ambitions for such a tool are not just to support curriculum and assessment planning and review, but to enable students to better understand – and so maximise – their learning and assessment journey. If feasible, this will be developed in 2020/21 for piloting in 2021/22.

#### **4.6 Careers advice** - *enhance the mechanisms through which professional careers advice is provided to all students.*

There have been some advancements made in this area – a careers leaflet and information card has been published and circulated to all students and a SRUC-wide Careers Event took place in February 2020.

Careers adviser appointments were to be made during faculty Service review. Unfortunately, this has been delayed by COVID 19, although approval to advertise the posts has been given and appointments will be made shortly. The intention is that the Academic Enhancement Lead (Student Journey) and Academic Enhancement Officer (Student Journey) work with the appointees to develop a SRUC specific approach to careers information, advice and guidance, with faculty concentrating on advice and guidance, and CELT focusing on embedding employability in learning and teaching.

The Academic Enhancement Lead (Student Journey) is a member of Colleges Scotland's Careers Information, Advice and Guidance working group, and will ensure alignment of developments with the sector.

The new Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy 2020-2025 focuses on enabling students to be successful in their careers with principles including the embedding of meta-skills and the development of authentic and industry-relevant curricula. Approved in March

2020, 2020/21 is a foundation year for this strategy – focusing on policy and staff development. In 2021/22-2023/24 a SRUC-wide Curriculum Review will take place which will realign curriculum content and delivery according to these – and other – principles.

## **5. Response to ELIR 2019 commendations**

### **5.1 Mental health awareness and support** - *SRUC has prioritised raising awareness and provided support for student mental health linked to the development of a Health and Wellbeing Strategy which is successfully delivered through the implementation of a range of initiatives involving both staff and students.*

Mental Health awareness and support is an area that has been a strength within SRUC for some time and has been recognised externally through awards. In the reflective analysis written for ELIR 4 we stated that “Mobile technologies need to be utilised and a project has been commissioned to develop a Student Portal solution that acts as a single digital access point for students and education staff to access all the key systems that they need. The Procurement of the Portal commenced in early 2019.” The MySRUC App has been implemented as SRUC’s portal with student support as a tile on the front page. This links to student support through a single click and provides access to a range of support such as addictions, anxiety and stress and gender-based violence.

TogetherAll (previously BigWhite Wall) has been implemented as a major source of information and support for both SRUC staff and students. An escalation system has been implemented with TogetherAll so that senior staff with a responsibility for student safeguarding can be contacted in the case of extreme emergency. Student utilisation of the system is monitored monthly through reporting to the Academic Leadership Team.

Currently, we do not use TogetherAll’s counselling function, but will review this in 2020/21, considering in particular SRUC spend of the SFC Student Counselling funding. SFC’s funding for additional counselling is currently being utilised in two ways: in the employment of dedicated counsellors (on three/six campuses) and in the extension of access to external counselling (on the other three/six campuses).

### **5.2 Supporting individual student journeys** - *SRUC has established effective mechanisms for identifying and supporting students’ individual needs, enabling them to be successful in their student journey. In many cases this allows students to achieve outcomes beyond their initial aspirations. This personalised approach to supporting students works well within the context of SRUC’s multiple campuses and geographic spread.*

This remains an underpinning principle in SRUC’s approach to delivery of all levels of education and is one of the two pillars of our new Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy (Learning for All). One of the four Academic aims of SRUC is that SRUC provides an inspiring work environment where staff and students realise their full potential. One

example where supporting individual student journeys has been further strengthened since ELIR 4 is through the review and revalidation of the Applied Animal Science (BSc Hons) degree. SRUC's biggest single area of HN delivery is currently Animal Care, however previously the progression to the degree in Applied Animal Science was not necessarily straightforward. This was addressed during review and revalidation and we have seen a doubling of applications for entry at year 2 of the degree and a tripling of entries at year 3 of the degree for 2020/21 Academic Year.

To further support this area, programme journey documents are in the process of being produced (anticipated completion Spring 2021) for all degree programmes areas at SRUC. Covering a range of information including demographics, entry requirements, entry qualifications, point of entry and exit, these will be useful tools in trend analysis and benchmarking of student journeys through SRUC's Higher Education portfolio.

**5.3 Communicating with staff** - *in a period of considerable restructuring and change, SRUC has paid attention to engaging staff at all stages of the process. SRUC has been particularly successful in employing an extensive range of communication measures including monthly briefings and consultations led by senior staff on all campuses. It was evident that staff valued the clarity this approach provided.*

Since the ELIR 4 review in May 2019, SRUC has enhanced the communications between senior leadership and colleagues in several areas. Introduced in May 2020, in response to COVID 19, the Executive Leadership Team now take part in a virtual Q&A session open to all staff. These sessions take place every six weeks and have helped raise some important issues for the senior leadership team to consider.

In May 2020 (?), SRUC also initiated a conversation with colleagues under the banner of 'Unified' to discuss a refreshed vision and mission for SRUC focussed on the natural economy. Starting with the Principal and Chief Executive setting out the rationale for the refresh, SRUC ran a total of 12 sessions exploring what this means for SRUC in areas as diverse as learning and teaching, to how we use our farms, and marketing.

Over the past year, SRUC has been rolling out the services included in Microsoft Office 365 which have helped to improve the flow of communications. This includes a new internal video sharing platform which has enabled colleagues to quickly share internal training events and knowledge sharing seminars. A new internal social network has provided the opportunity for colleagues to connect on topics that interest them professionally and personally and has been used to facilitate conversations about how SRUC will evolve its policies and procedures. To support remote collaboration and intra-team communications, Microsoft Teams has been adopted across most of SRUC.

To support colleagues looking to keep on top of internal platforms and to help connect different parts of the organisation, a weekly email rounding up points of interest and need to know information was introduced in June 2019. More recently, this email was changed to a daily update to manage the information required during the early stages of Covid-19.

With a focus specifically on Learning and Teaching, two fora have been created: Heads of Department Forum and Programme Leaders Forum. The former meets once a quarter and the latter once a month, both led by members of CELT. However, during Covid-19, the Programme Leaders Forum has been meeting weekly. These fora enable and enhance communication, as well as provide space for staff development. Further fora have been requested by staff, specifically for Academic Liaison Managers, Support Tutors and Librarians. These will be set up in 2020/21, again led by members of CELT.

SRUC plan further changes to improve internal communications in the future. Including an update to the staff intranet and the underlying communications infrastructure.

**5.4 Academic staff development** - *SRUC recognises the importance of providing development opportunities for all academic staff as identified in the personal development process. In addition, SRUC actively supports academic staff to engage with a range of external and internal development opportunities including the well-attended annual learning and teaching conference and other formal study, pedagogic research and conference opportunities.*

SRUC continues to recognise the importance of providing development opportunities for all academic staff. The creation of CELT in 2019/20 aimed to enhance this further. One of the key purposes of CELT is around academic staff development, specifically around learning and teaching, the student journey, digital learning, and student representation. While the new post of Academic Enhancement Lead (Staff Development) has oversight of academic development activities, nearly every member of CELT has academic development within their role remit.

The CELT team have developed an Academic Development Framework, focusing on our approach to such activities, which was approved at Learning and Teaching Committee. One of the principles within this framework is that CELT will take into account the intensities of SRUC colleagues' working life, their lack of time for development, and the dispersed nature of the organisation.

This is witnessed in our six-week intensive summer staff development programme. The programme comprises bite-sized pieces of staff development, focused on supporting staff to be ready for 2020/21's blended learning approach, which either are, or will be made, available asynchronously. Taking advantage of the – usually – quieter time of August, this programme enables staff to engage when and how they are most able.

Outwith the intensive summer months, academic development currently occurs in the following ways:

- i. Workshops, webinars and development of resources focused on key themes arising from internal and external reviews. In 2019/20, this meant the development of the Getting the Best out of Moodle programme (4.2), workshops on topics such as ClickView, H5P, and safeguarding, webinars on topics such as

developing online materials and accessibility, and the creation of resources on assessment and feedback.

- ii. Bespoke activities as requested by programme teams, such as workshops/guidance on creating alternative assessments, implementing practical learning, and developing effective feedback.
- iii. Learning design development for those undergoing Institution-Led Review, Validation and Revalidation.
- iv. Creation of forums (see section 5.3)
- v. Maximising access to and undertaking of relevant teaching qualifications (see section 4.3) and supporting staff to gain fellowship recognition.
- vi. Signposting and supporting access to relevant external opportunities, from webinars and workshops to participation in Aurora and the Scottish Academic Leadership Programme.

CELT works closely with Registry, Information and Digital Services, Organisational Development, and other professional support services to maximise development opportunities. Organisational Development run a successful leadership programme, open to all SRUC colleagues, which is seeing increasing academic take up.

In light of the changes in 2019/20, the current academic staff development policy is in the process of being revised. The intention is to create one overarching SRUC Staff Development policy, in collaboration with Organisational Development, the developing Doctoral College and our Vet Services, with a specific learning and teaching focused sub-policy. This will ensure consistency while allowing for work specificities. It is anticipated that this work will be complete by January 2021, for ratification by the February 2021 Learning and Teaching Committee.

The Academic Division are also currently developing a Workload Allocation Model, into which CPD will be embedded, which aims to improve colleague take-up of developmental opportunities.

## **6. Conclusion and Next Steps**

SRUC engaged with ELIR in a positive and enthusiastic way. Institutionally we believe the peer engagement, support and guidance that comes from the process (both formal reports and informal engagement) is extremely constructive and helpful. SRUC has continued to develop since ELIR 4 and although there have been challenges associated with COVID 19, it has also permitted us to focus on our priorities and development activities. The recent refining of our Strategy provides a focus on both the attainment of degree awarding powers and also of our place at the nexus of government, industry and the natural economy.

## **7. Further information**

Further information is available from Dr Kyrsten Black, SRUC Registrar;  
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