



## End of Year 2 Report for Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC)

The key purposes of this report are to: -

- provide a framework for HEIs to report on their Theme activity that has taken place over the year
- help share information across the sector on the benefits and challenges around Theme engagement.

Please report under the headings below. The report should be about 6 to 8 sides of A4 in length.

### Institutional team

Identify any changes in Theme leadership, TLG and institutional team membership since details were reported in the institutional plan developed at the start of the academic year.

There are no changes to the Theme leadership or institutional team membership.

### Evaluation of activities/outcomes

To make evaluation processes more accessible and user friendly, we have attempted to simplify (not minimise) the evaluation reporting process into 7 key questions (see below). Prior to completing these, it would be useful to refer to the QAAS website resource: [A Guide to Basic Evaluation in HE](#) (specifically, Section 8, Summary overview on page 23, and the Evaluation Checklist – Appendix A, on pages 28-29).

Please report each activity/intervention against the following questions in the Evaluation part of the template.

N. B. You may have already realised some of your objectives and/or these might be ongoing, so please delineate each question according to whether activities or interventions have been completed already in this reporting year or are in process.

(Easiest way is to delete **either/or** options highlighted in **red** in questions below):

### Evaluation

Title of project/activity
Project 1: Raise Awareness and Develop Student Communities
1. What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)
This year the student interns were looking at how SRUCSA could improve its processes to get more students involved in setting up communities. The interns conducted interviews with staff members at other students' associations to find out what successes and challenges they had. The interns also spoke to students who run our current student groups to find out how they found the experience.
2. Why are we making it? (Rationale for the change)
SRUCSA has for a long time had a decreasing level of activity around student led clubs and societies. We had identified that the processes that we have in place contribute to the problem. We have previously tried to slim down the processes. Even in this state we had students who would show interest but fail to

complete the minimal paperwork. Without these groups being formed, students are not being offered the opportunity to mix in this way outside of teaching. There is also a missed opportunity as club and society leaders can be developed as student voice experts. This would make them more likely to take part in SRUC student voice work and would be more likely to run for SRUCSA officer positions in future.
<b>3. What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)</b>
Having the interns look at the current processes and identify and show how to remove these barriers will hopefully lead to more students initiating clubs and societies. Barriers will be identified and ways by which to remove them will be introduced. With these changes in place more students will go from 'interested' to 'initiated' and will start their own groups. These clubs and societies give an opportunity to students to make relationships with other students in a context outside of learning. This will also lead to more conversations between SRUCSA and students, leading to a more informed student voice in our representative work.
<b>4. How do we/will we know? (How is the change measured)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with four Students' Association staff members completed.</li> <li>• Conversations with three Club/society leaders completed.</li> <li>• Barriers to completing paperwork identified and written up.</li> <li>• Suggestions on how to remove these barriers written up.</li> <li>• Two students having completed the changed processes.</li> </ul>
<b>5. Who is involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Student Interns.</li> <li>• SRUCSA Elected officers</li> <li>• Students who take part by talking to the interns or completing the student group process.</li> </ul>
<b>6. Any lessons learned to apply already? (Applied ongoing learning)</b>
We have learned that some student interns need a tight framework to be able to get into the project more quickly. With hours restricted and some of these needed for induction activities, more pre-work is required. We have learned that May onwards is a bad time to try to start new student activities as many of the students are focused on getting their studies complete. We have learned that any level of formfilling or paperwork is a barrier to students starting clubs and societies and that a meeting with an enthusiastic person with SRUCSA who can complete some basic details for them is probably a better way to get students initiated.
<b>7. Any things you need to stop doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)</b>
We have learned that we need to stop asking students to fill in paperwork so early and have more supportive conversations beforehand.

<b>Title of project/activity</b>
Project 2: Develop a Tear Tutor Learning Community
<b>1. What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)</b>
<p>The need to focus on Year Tutors was identified in last year's Enhancement Theme research and highlights and acknowledges the key role that Year Tutors play in enhancing the student experience while recognising the need for peer support.</p> <p>The aim for this year's project was to work in collaboration with the Year Tutors to gain a better understanding of what they need, how we could create a community fit for them, and how best we could support them in their work to support students.</p> <p>Our approach was to:</p>

- Work with Year Tutors to understand what was working well, what support they needed and what this might look like in practice, by using questionnaires, holding focus groups, stakeholder meetings and undertaking a padlet activity
- Researching what other institutions are doing, including carrying out a literature review, and meeting with other Year Tutors (or equivalent).

## 2. Why are we making it? (Rationale for the change)

It was recognised that there is a key group of staff (around 240 Year Tutors) undertaking the same role, in a variety of subjects and locations, yet some have a different understanding of their role or where and when to access support from the wider SRUC community.

The aim of this project was to build on the successful communities identified in last year's research and work in consultation and collaboration with all Year Tutors to determine (and then implement) what kind of learning community would suit their needs, would enhance their role, and would enable them to provide peer support for each other.

The focus on Year Tutors was owing to two reasons:

- This group does not currently have a community space where they can access peer support.
- The Year Tutor role itself is fundamental to supporting student learning communities and by creating the Year Tutor community this will aim to enhance the student experience overall.

## 3. What difference has occurred/will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)

The research highlighted that Year Tutors would welcome the development of a Year Tutor Toolkit along with an online support space, where they can meet, problem solve, share, and support each other.

The act of working with Year Tutors in this project has in and of itself enabled us to start to bring a community together. The work has also resulted in key recommendations, such as:

- Reviewing the role of the Year Tutor.
- Developing a toolkit of key information with links to resources.
- Implementing a training programme shaped to the academic year including involvement in reviewing, simplifying and streamlining administrative systems (the model for such a training programme has been developed as part of this year's project).
- Explicitly recognising the importance of this role, and the impact it can have on wellbeing.

Through implementation of the recommendations, it is aimed that there will be greater clarity regarding the role, improved efficiency and access to key information, greater capacity to undertake the role, and improved staff wellbeing (particularly with the responding to staff voice), all of which should positively impact of the student experience.

## 4. How do we/will we know? (How is the change measured)

We had significant engagement in the project with over 75% of Year Tutors engaging in some way. This included 47 who engaged via informal interviews and a Padlet, 43 who engaged via focus groups, and 96 who engaged via a questionnaire. By consulting with them and undertaking these activities and listening to their story, they reported that they felt heard. They also reported that it was helpful to discuss the role with others and learn from each other's experiences.

Following implementation of the recommendations, impact will be measured by the successful revision of the Year Tutor policy, staff engagement in activities (via usage stats for the toolkit and attendance at staff development events) and via seeking feedback from users.

## 5. Who has been involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)

Key stakeholders have comprised Year Tutors, the ET Institutional Group, Project Leads, Student Interns, CELT's Academic Enhancement Team, the Academic Leadership Team, Academic Liaison Managers and the Students' Association.

6. Any lessons learned to apply already? (Applied ongoing learning)

- The importance and value of scheduling and implementing a timetabled slot where Year Tutors can share, collaborate, and communicate with pastoral and academic support areas on a regular 4-weekly basis to ensure that students have an integrated and consistent approach and triangulation of information.
- The need for the Year Tutor to set boundaries, referring to the relevant service when necessary, rather than taking on support activities out with their expertise.
- The need for targeted staff development.

7. Any things you need to stop doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

See above.

Title of project/activity

Project 3: Digitalisation of Peer Support

1. What change has been made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

There have been several developments with the project this year:

- The peer support Moodle course has been updated regularly to ensure that all information and training is up to date, and to address student feedback.
- We have created a dedicated peer support email inbox and project coordination teams' channel to ensure that all the knowledge gained so far on the project can be retained for the future.
- Due to the high levels of engagement with the project, another staff member is now working on peer support. The two staff members have split the groups and workload between them. This will be beneficial for next year when we increase the number of projects further.
- At the end of last year, we had 1 peer support project running. This year we will have 4 (another 4 projects were started but were paused due to reasons outlined in section 7).
- Peer support is now available to a much higher number of students (875 in total, compared to 81 last year).
- We have started a weekly announcement on the Moodle page to let students know what peer support opportunities are coming up. We have also started to write staff blogs on upcoming peer support events, and to promote said events at our weekly Programme Leaders' Forum.
- We have added SRUC marketing/ comms staff into the volunteer and staff teams channels for each group. This has built a collaborative link for the volunteers, who are now able to directly ask comms staff for help in promoting their projects.
- We have altered our finance processes so that groups have more control over their own purchasing.
- We have designed and delivered a range of staff development activities on peer support, including a 20 minute 'intro to peer support' presentation for all staff with an interest in taking part.

2. Why have we made it? (Rationale for the change)

Many of the changes we have made this year reflect the fact that interest in peer support is growing at SRUC, and that several of our projects are becoming more autonomous. The changes are designed to ensure that we have good practices in place to manage and respond to interest, whilst empowering our existing groups to be as autonomous as possible and to develop their groups. To this end we have updated our training package to ensure that volunteers are confident in their roles, adjusted our finance

Processes to give groups more autonomy, introduced volunteers to comms staff so they can directly ask for help promoting their projects, expanded the number of staff supporting groups to 2 and introduced a specific peer support email address.

We have also made some changes to help raise awareness of the peer support groups. This includes a weekly Moodle announcement for students outlining what opportunities are available, regular staff blogs and updates at our weekly staff forums. To empower staff and to raise awareness we have also designed and delivered staff development on peer support.

Where we have started new groups, this has been done based on student or staff interest and to increase the number of students that have access to a group. In the cases where we have started groups and then later paused them, this was done because the projects were not working for a variety of reasons (for details see section 7).

### 3. What difference has occurred as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)

#### **Autonomy & Engagement**

In terms of promoting the autonomy of our groups, we have seen a noticeable change in behaviour already. This is most clearly evidenced in our volunteers. Where previously it would be challenging to get them to turn their cameras/ microphones on when they met with staff, we now find that they are actively engaged in meetings. They regularly contribute ideas, ask for advice and seek us out with their planning. Often volunteers are now reaching out to us to arrange a meeting, rather than the other way around. On several occasions volunteers have been meeting to plan their sessions, have seen that a staff member is free on teams and have called us in. This was a great thing to happen and marked a real progression in volunteers' confidence from not wanting to speak in a planning meeting to actively seeking staff out to join. This increase in confidence for volunteers have led to them becoming more engaged in general, with 3 volunteers putting themselves forward in our SRUCSA Elections for the Co-President roles.

We now find that the 4 active groups get on with planning their sessions without needing to be prompted and reach out under their own initiative to plan sessions. Volunteers have also started proactively creating their own resources, such as study playlists, assessment tracking tools, logos for their groups etc. They have contributed many different ways of engaging with students that we had not originally anticipated – for instance, the collaborative study playlists and study skills tools mentioned above.

We can also see a similar behaviour change in staff. Whereas in the past central staff have driven all the requests for meetings, we are now increasingly seeing subject staff reach out to volunteers to check in with how things are going, and to see what support is needed. We are also seeing a wider network of subject staff getting involved in the project, with several requests to start a group in their subject area next year, requests for staff development activities on peer support and staff from marketing/ comms helping students to promote their groups.

#### **Access to Peer Support**

We have also seen a rise in the number of peer support groups and the number of students with access to them. With 4 groups running regularly (where previously there was just one), 875 SRUC students now have access to some form of peer support. We also now have 15 active volunteers running the projects and have secured at least one staff contact for every group. The peer support project is growing, and we hope to expand this even further in the future.

### 4. How do we know? (How is the change measured)

In terms of autonomy and engagement, the change has been measured in some of the behaviour changes in staff and students (as described above in section 3). However, as evidence of success and engagement we have also used the following metrics:

- Student feedback (quotes include 'being a volunteer has made me feel so much more confident with talking to people online and running meetings' and 'it's been really helpful to discuss things that come up in class with other people and share ideas').

- Staff feedback (including a short video by one of our staff contacts outlining their experiences of peer support and encouraging other staff to get involved).
- Number of projects (4).
- Number of attempted but paused projects (4), as although they did not run successfully for the full year there is still evidence of engagement and need. These projects will be picked up again in the future and lessons learned applied to the project as a whole.
- Number of volunteers (15).
- Number of notes of interest (50). Again, whilst not all these students ended up volunteering with us, and some dropped out, this number is still instructive in the sense that it gives us an indication of interest, and why some students might not choose to pursue the opportunity. Identifying this, and why students drop out, will help us to address any barriers to the opportunity and to improve our support for volunteers.
- Number of students with access to peer support (875).
- Number of emails received by peer support inbox (512).
- Resources created by volunteers (logos, examples of good practice).

#### 5. Who has been involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)

Judgements are made by a combination of stakeholders:

- CELT staff, particularly the Academic Enhancement Team.
- SRUC's Enhancement Theme Institutional Group, to which this project reports.
- Student volunteers help to evaluate their own projects and experiences.
- Staff involved in the groups can evaluate their own projects and experience.
- Attendee feedback is used to evaluate the groups.

#### 6. Any lessons learned to apply already? (Applied ongoing learning)

The primary learning has centred on how to empower staff and students to run their own projects autonomously. This was felt to be important for managing the time input needed by central staff, but also to enhance the projects. We have had some success with this aim this year, with 4 groups now running with a good degree of autonomy. However, in some cases we were not able to achieve this (see below). In this case lessons have been learned about the best way to spark student interest and to empower them, and when a project is requiring too much staff input on a regular basis (and so needs to be paused).

We have found that our efforts to increase awareness of peer support have been working well, and we plan to continue this next year. This includes announcements on our peer support Moodle course, connecting students with comms staff, encouraging them to create their own promotional materials and promoting peer support to staff via blogs and at our weekly Programme Leaders Forum.

Engaging the wider team further in the project has also worked very well, as the project can benefit from the various skillsets and institutional expertise on offer. We plan to continue this learning as the project moves forward.

#### 7. Any things you have stopped doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

The primary thing that we stopped doing was some of the peer support groups themselves. We had interest in setting up groups in 4 other subject areas, which included getting volunteers and staff on board and running planning meetings. However, for various reasons these groups did not get off the ground, and so the difficult decision was made by Academic Enhancement, the Enhancement Theme Institutional group and the staff/ students to pause these projects for now. However, this will be picked up next year as the interest demonstrates that there is an appetite/ need for the groups.

Some of the reasons the groups were paused included:

- Central staff finding that they had to do all the organising for each session, with students not confident to take it and run with it. It was felt that this was too reliant on staff, and not sustainable for the future.

- Challenges engaging volunteers on a continuous basis.
- Subject staff not having the time to dedicate to the project.
- Some projects started too late, or in January. From here it was difficult to get it going as students were already busy. We plan to rectify this by promoting peer support much earlier next year as part of induction.

Title of project/activity

Student Intern Engagement

1. What change has been made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

Building on previous years, our approach to the Enhancement Themes includes the employment of a small number of student interns to support and/or lead on certain projects, with support from staff project leads. This year, three student interns were employed to support projects one and two.

2. Why have we made it? (Rationale for the change)

The purpose of employing student interns to lead and support projects is to underpin quality enhancement activities with a students as partners ethos by creating a shared space for students and staff to work together, and to directly enhance the student experience through the way the Enhancement Theme is managed.

3. What difference has occurred as a result? (Tangible change made successfully or envisaged)

As well as enabling a students as partners approach to the Enhancement Theme, the employment of student interns has cultivated student engagement and community. This has been evidenced by student interns applying for SRUCSA opportunities and also taking part in wider activities like Institution-Led Reviews and mini-research projects: being a student intern has been a stepping stone for students to put themselves forward for wider student representation activities.

The development of community has been evidenced by the fact that the current student interns asked for the creation of a CELT Student Interns Alumni Community (CSI-AC), which includes a Teams community space where former and current student interns can meet to share updates, support any future student interns, and divulge any 'top tips' and shortcuts they learned from their experience. Although only live for two weeks, the page has seen 15 posts, and has membership from the last three years' of student interns. The space will enable us to encourage further engagement in representation and engagement activities.

One quote: 'the internship allowed me to go behind the scenes at SRUC and see what it's like from a teaching perspective – it also complimented my role at SRUCSA as Students with Disabilities Officer.'

4. How do we know? (How is the change measured)

- One of the 2020/21 student interns acted as student representative on an Institution-Led Review panel in 2021/22.
- Two of the 2021/22 student interns were elected as SRUCSA co-presidents for 2022/23.
- All seven of the student interns since 2019/20 have joined, or expressed interest in joining, the alumni teams page, including those no longer studying at SRUC.

We will continue to monitor engagement on the page through activity and engagement in further SRUC activities.

5. Who has been involved in making any judgements? (Who decides on effectiveness)

The following stakeholders have been involved in making judgements.

- CELT – Academic Enhancement Team and Leads.
- Student Interns who share their progress and discuss their projects and experiences at update meetings.
- Feedback from Year Tutors, Faculty Staff and Programme Leaders.

6. Any lessons learned to apply already? (Applied ongoing learning)

Our lessons have mainly focused on the process of recruiting and supporting student interns. In particular:

- Taking regular temperature checks with both project leads and student interns throughout the project work, along with highlighting and sharing good practice that is already in place, working and successful.
- Building in additional time for student interns to undertake compliance modules when they commence their internship.
- Including an additional question in the interview process around competing demands and being able to demonstrate how they would prioritise the role/course work etc.
- Adapting the format of meetings to make them more accessible, following up with a summary of what has been agreed before moving onto the next project's update.
- Being mindful of shared projects, supporting the interns to agree on their objectives, research findings and recommendations.

7. Any things you have stopped doing? (Any unsuccessful elements)

Forging on with projects when there is a need to pause reflect and give more time to a specific project due to timing, competing demands, and managing student and staff wellbeing.

**Dissemination of work**

Which mechanisms have been most effective in disseminating outcomes and resources internally, and to the sector? Please provide examples.

If there are materials and resources you can share with the sector, please provide details below.

Internal: there have been several internal mechanisms that have been effective such as student and staff comms, blogs, updates at staff forums and Enhancement Themes page. The Institutional Theme Group are pivotal in sharing outcomes and resources amongst their networks. Specific project outcomes have been shared at Academic Leadership Team meetings and will be shared via our Student Support and Engagement Committee.

External: promotion at CDN, discussions with Theme Reps and staff from other institutions, delivery of presentations to other organisations (e.g., via Landex and Education Scotland).

**Collaboration outwith your institution**

How have you collaborated with other institutions? This could be informally by growing networks or contacts, or more formally for example, through collaborative clusters or sector work. If you have been collaborating with others, briefly explain what this has involved and what have been the benefits and challenges.

There have been no formal collaborations with other institutions apart from sharing our thoughts about our existing projects on an informal basis. A common theme appeared to be competing demands and prioritising and allocating time to attend where possible the QAA events on offer.

**Supporting staff and student engagement**



How have staff and students been supported to engage in Theme activities? Please provide examples.

Both staff and students have been encouraged to take part and engage in projects by answering surveys and questionnaires, by taking part in face to face and remote meetings, and by using asynchronous collaboration tools like Padlets. Using multiple means of engagement has meant that staff and students can engage in the way best for them. We have also used our various communication mechanisms and the engagement activities to promote how staff and students can be involved in future Enhancement Theme activities. Several staff have communicated via e-mail and verbally that they would like to be involved in projects and activities, with 2 further staff volunteering for the ETIG group and 1 further potential offer from the students' association.

### Processes

What are you learning from the processes, approaches and structures you are using to support this Theme?

How will this report be used/distributed within your institution?

We are learning that although some systems and processes are working well, there is always room to re-visit existing practice, (this includes good practice) and refine or use what is working well, seeing if it is transferrable or could be tweaked given the changes since the pandemic. We have also learnt the importance of aligning to a strategic approach, for example identifying projects through wider activities, including previous Enhancement Theme work and our other quality enhancement activities (e.g., Annual Monitoring).

Working with other institutions around clubs and societies has been invaluable since it has opened up opportunities for future collaborations as relations have been established. This suggests that further collaboration should be developed through future Theme projects and activities.

The report will be circulated through our Leadership Teams, usual communication mechanisms (e.g., blogs, intranet site and emails), committees and forums. We will also use the existing networks of the institutional group to help dissemination. The aim is to create a short video summary of the work for sharing with staff and students.

### Looking ahead

In session 2022-23 we will be starting to consider what the next Enhancement Theme might focus on. We are interested to know about the discussions, hot topics and issues that are emerging in your practice and gaining increasing attention. Please share your thoughts and views below.

Following discussion at our final Institutional Group meeting, suggested areas for focus included distance learning, blended learning, mental health and wellbeing (staff and student), student identity, sustainability, enterprise, and working towards SFC's ambitions for a new approach to higher education in Scotland.

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