



Resilient Learning Communities

Institutional Plan for: Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC)

This document will form your year 3 plan and should be around three to four sides of A4. You can find your year 1 and plans through this [web page](#).

Context

Provide any statements that might be helpful in explaining your institution's context and approach and how this plan supports the achievement of institutional priorities. Any context statement could draw on salient points from the previous year's learning/outcomes from Theme work and reflect any changes in the strategic direction of your institution.

We continue to implement the 2020-25 Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy outlined in the Year 2 plan of work. Through this, we continue to support the enhancement of learning communities and the development of active and blended learning. The development of resilient learning communities is key to this – as is the first and foremost principle of the Strategy – working with our learners as partners. It is within this context that the Enhancement Theme work sits. Our Enhancement Theme work spans across SRUC, but the projects are coordinated by our Enhancement Theme Institutional Group (ETIG), which has membership from across our institution.

Our plan for 2022-23 is to continue to build and create a range of communities at campus, faculty and Pan-SRUC levels based on research undertaken by the Student Interns in Year 1 and project developments in Year 2. Year 3 will focus primarily on implementing many of the recommendations identified in the earlier years. We aim for the enhancement theme work to support the student experience as we continue to move from emergency blended learning, implemented owing to the pandemic, to active blended learning in line with the Strategy.

Institutional team

Please specify for each member whether staff or student and for staff, their role title. Where the Theme Leaders’ Group (TLG) staff or student nominee is unable to attend meetings, an alternate can attend on their behalf.

Institutional lead	Dr Pauline Hanesworth, Head of Learning and Teaching
TLG staff representative	Alison Boyle, Academic Enhancement Lead (Student Journey)

TLG student representative	Claire Williams SRUCSA Co-President North
Additional Team Member	Dr Lisa Nowak, Academic Enhancement Officer (Student Journey)
Additional Team Member	Ruth Tudor, Student Support Tutor (Pastoral)
Additional Team Member	Sarah Young, Careers Adviser
Additional Team Member	2 x Class Reps (TBC)

Overall outcomes/activity

Are there any changes to your key priorities, outcomes and delivery activities that you identified at the start of the Theme?

Many of our key priorities have remained the same, with outcomes focussing on developing communities and building on a sense of belonging amongst students, Year Tutors, and the growth of peer support. However, as the projects have evolved and strands of activity have been evaluated, some delivery activities have developed and shifted to maximize impact and enhance the student and staff experience at SRUC.

Two key examples of this are projects 1 and 2, which now shift from research to implementation. Another example is Project 3, which initially focussed on the development of digital peer support at SRUC. Whilst this remains a key priority for us (as a multi-campus institution committed to blended learning), this year we plan to include some face-to-face delivery to enhance the project.

Year 3 outcomes/activity

In answering the following, identify what is continuing from year 2 and what is new:

What are your key priorities?

What outcomes do you want to achieve?

What activities will you deliver to achieve your key priorities?

Project 1: Developing Student Communities

The core priority for this project remains the same: to both raise awareness of, and develop, student communities. This particularly focuses on SRUCSA, our Students' Association. SRUCSA have seen a decreasing level of engagement with student-led clubs and societies over recent years.

The core outcome of this project is to identify and remove barriers to participation, particularly those centred around our processes and structures. The focus in Year 2 was to carry out a research exercise to identify barriers, and to arrive at a series of recommendations. The focus of Year 3's activities will be the implementation of these recommendations, with the aim of increasing the uptake of student-led societies.

The recommendations include:

- The introduction of a new society structure (consisting of 3 variations, depending on the complexity of the proposal)
- Improved and simplified documentation for the constitution, affiliation and financialization processes
- An improved website layout

Project 2: Developing a Year Tutor Community

The core aim of the project remains the same: to develop an effective learning community and to provide peer support to enhance the role of Year Tutors. The key outcomes for Year 3 were identified in our Year 2 project report, along with some suggested delivery activities. Year 3 will focus on the implementation of these, a summary of which can be found below.

Some core principles need to underpin any outcomes and delivery. The first is for Year Tutors to feel that their challenges are being taken seriously by senior staff and that real change is taking place at a systemic level.

Year Tutors have and continue to be involved in the developments, with their voice being central to decisions made. Creating a supportive Year Tutor community is a process which needs facilitating by Years Tutors with support from academic support services.

The following delivery activities were identified for Year 3:

1. Review of the description of the Year Tutor role in the Education Manual
2. Creation of a 'toolkit' of key information and links to resources
3. Creation and delivery of a training programme shaped to the academic year
4. Year Tutor involvement in reviewing and streamlining of administration systems
5. Feedback to the Academic Leadership Team and Year Tutors

Project 3: Digitisation of Peer Support

The key priorities for this project remain much the same as in Year 2. They include the establishment of high quality, sustainable and student-led peer support groups across SRUC, all of which have some digital presence.

We hope to achieve a range of outcomes, including an increase in the number of groups and students with access to peer support, embedding and ensuring the sustainability of existing groups and raising staff and student awareness of the groups. This will be reflected in higher attendance and an increase in staff contacting CELT to find out more about peer support. Other outcomes include behaviour changes in our volunteers such as increased confidence, skills development and teamworking.

To deliver these priorities, CELT staff will lead on the recruitment and training of volunteers, as well as meeting regularly with groups to help them plan their activities. CELT will support staff and students to reflect on their groups to identify both good practice and development points. This will be supported by reviewing and updating our core digital platform (the Peer Support Moodle course) and our training package for students. The delivery will be varied across online and in-person, depending on practicalities.

Using Theme resources from sector projects

In the year 3 report we will ask you what resources you have used and which you have found to be most valuable. It would be helpful for us to know now, how, and which resources, you may be planning to use in year 3 of the Theme and beyond (from the Anti-Racist Curriculum project, Valuing and Recognising Prior Learning and Experience, Understanding Micro-credentials and Small Qualifications in Scotland, the Student-Led Project, Student Mental Wellbeing).

Several QAA resources have been used throughout this workstream over years 1 and 2. Many will continue to be used in Year 3.

The student-led work into building digital student communities has been utilised in project 3 (digitisation of peer support), both as a guide for staff working on the project and in a condensed format in our volunteer training. The same is also true for the student-led work into developing equitable learning opportunities, which has informed the creation of our Moodle course to best promote accessibility for all potential volunteers.

Although it is not currently in the plan for the Year 3 work, we hope to be able to utilise the work on understanding micro-credentials to strengthen our work on projects 1 and 3 going forward (student communities and peer support). We also want to look at using some of this learning to promote volunteer reward and recognition, and to encourage ongoing learning and development. This will likely extend beyond the current Theme, as we embed this work into our standard practice.

One of the most useful QAA resources in years 1 and 2 (and that we anticipate being extremely helpful in year 3) has been the ongoing sessions on evaluation design, as well as opportunities such as the QAA Enhancement Themes Conference. These sessions have been invaluable in guiding and informing our approach to evaluation, which has developed significantly since year 1. They have also facilitated connections across the sector, and the sharing of best practice.

Evaluation

How do you intend to evaluate your year 3 projects and activities?

Prior to completing this section, 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 complete briefly the following 5 questions for each activity or intervention (N.B. Just cut and paste the table below as many times as necessary). This will help you complete your end of year 3 report.

Title of project/activity

Project 1: Developing Student Communities

What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

The primary changes will be the implementation of recommendations detailing how SRUCSA can adjust its processes and structures to better facilitate/ encourage the establishment of student communities, including clubs and societies.

The recommendations include:

- The introduction of a new society structure (consisting of 3 variations)
- Improved and simplified documentation for the constitution, affiliation and financialisation processes
- An improved website layout

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

SRUCSA has identified that certain structures and processes can act as a barrier to the establishment of student-led clubs and societies. Given how valuable these groups are for the SRUC community and the student experience, this is a missed opportunity that SRUC want to rectify. The recommendations identified in the Year 2 research report will therefore be implemented in Year 3.

Specific rationales for each change are outlined below:

- Introduction of new society structure. The research noted that students wishing to create a society often have ideas of varying complexity. To reflect this, a new system will be introduced, whereby staff will direct students towards establishing a Student Interest Group (SIG), Simple Society or Complex Society. Each level of society will have different requirements, mostly around whether a constitution, committee, annual elections, or bank account are required.
- Improved and simplified documentation. The research exercise found that the constitution document was too long and complex, which could act as a barrier for students wanting to form a society. Likewise, there was some duplication in the affiliation form. Year 3 work will focus on finding a less daunting way to present this information, particularly by shortening and simplifying the constitution document.
- Improved website layout. A re-write of the content is planned, so that students are directed to a suitable amount of pertinent information (at present, there is too much content). This will be replaced with an email template, addressed to SRUCSA staff, which students complete. This will allow SRUCSA staff to assess the complexity of the idea/ suggestion and respond accordingly.

What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change envisaged)

- More student-led clubs and societies started, with support from SRUCSA
- Greater interest in establishing clubs and societies (measured through email requests, interest at outreach days etc.)
- A thriving student community at SRUC, with a range of possible extra-curricular activities
- More students engaged in student-led clubs and societies

How will we know? (How the change is measured)

- Number of clubs/ societies
- Fewer instances where students get in contact about starting a society, but this ultimately does not come to fruition

- A greater number of student-led events
- Higher attendance figures at student-led clubs and societies
- More student interest in clubs and societies (measured by emails, interest at outreach days)
- Shorter timeframe between initial interest and establishment of a club/ society

Title of project/activity

Project 2: Develop a Year Tutor Learning Community

What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

Now that the research phase of this project is complete, the primary changes planned for Year 3 focus on implementation.

The following delivery activities were identified for Year 3:

1. Review of the description of the Year Tutor role in the Education Manual
2. Creation of a 'toolkit' of key information and links to resources
3. Design and delivery of a training programme shaped to the academic year
4. Year Tutor involvement in reviewing and streamlining of administration systems
5. Feedback to the Academic Leadership Team and Year Tutors

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

The research project identified several core principles which offer a rationale for the proposed changes/ delivery areas, and which must underpin any future activity.

The first is for Year Tutors to feel that their concerns are being taken seriously by senior staff and that real change is taking place at a systemic level. Year Tutors need to be involved in the developments, with their voice being central to decisions made. Resourcing must be considered, and the changes needed are likely to require additional staff to implement them. Creating a supportive Year Tutor community is a process which needs facilitating.

Furthermore, there are specific rationales offered for each proposed change:

- Education Manual. This Year Tutor role was written in 2017 and will be reviewed and updated. This will be done in collaboration with Year Tutors, to reflect the reality of the role as it exists today.
- Toolkit. The research identified that support was required for our Year Tutors, and that this should be easy to navigate. An online toolkit in a similar format to the resource for Programme Leaders should be developed to meet this need. An initial framework should be created, then a 'Wikipedia' approach used where Year Tutors can add information to build the resource.
- Training programme. To supplement the above, the research phase indicated that a training programme was needed. This will help to build the community by providing a

space to share expertise in a concise way, allowing time for discussions. This platform could also be used to launch other interventions.

- Input to review of administration systems. The research identified that Year Tutors should be involved in this work so that they can help to ensure that any proposed solutions are effective and efficient.
- Feedback to academic leadership and Year Tutors. This delivery activity will be vital for ensuring that the work becomes embedded, and that Year Tutors are kept informed of/ involved with developments in the project.

What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change envisaged)

- Development of Year Tutor Toolkit and online support space
- Review of the Year Tutor role
- Implementation of training programme
- Simplification of administrative systems
- Increased recognition of the importance of the Year Tutor role

How will we know? (How the change is measured)

- Feedback from Year Tutors
- Engagement with training & development (i.e., attendance figures, regular attendance, to which the community becomes self-sustaining, usage statistics for toolkit)
- Revision of Year Tutor policy

Title of project/activity

Project 3: Digitalisation of Peer Support

What change is being made? (Brief description(s) of overall activity/intervention)

The project will be rolled out again in Year 3, using many of the structures and processes established in years 1 and 2. However, some key changes for year 3 have been planned:

- Review/ update of the peer support Moodle page, in line with volunteer feedback and learning from other projects in the 'Resilient Learning Communities' workstream. Planned updates include:
 1. Bringing the module in-line with Moodle and accessibility standards.
 2. Streamlining content and introducing new training material on things that our volunteers identified were important/ missing (e.g., enhanced training on using MS Teams to build engagement and promote groups). We plan to include examples of work that our groups and volunteers have created within the training, so that new

students can get a better idea of what they could create. This includes videos, posters and logos created by our students in years 1 and 2.

- Whilst the digital element of our project remains crucial (given our status as a multi-campus institution committed to blended learning), in year 3 this will be supplemented by on-campus visits where possible. This primarily focuses on welcome week for recruitment purposes, as well as regular meetings (where possible) to support volunteers and staff.
- To trial offering a wider range of activities, where suitable. For instance, large enough groups with sufficient volunteers could have a 'split' in their delivery, whereby some volunteers run the cross-campus online activities, and others run on-campus activities. This would mean that the main 'umbrella' group has off-shoots within it, offering more specific activities at a local level. Yet, the overarching cross-campus element (along with all the benefits) is retained through the umbrella group and digital platforms.
- Investigating how we can best develop a community of volunteers, so that students from different groups can share best practice and problem-solve with one another.
- To continue to promote autonomy, particularly amongst our more established groups. This includes working with staff contacts so that they understand what is needed to ensure that the groups continue to run year on year, and become more familiar with the theory, structure, and processes of peer support.

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

Update to Moodle course and training

The Moodle page was set up and developed in years 1 and 2, in line with models and processes used elsewhere in the sector. However, the learning from years 1 and 2 has allowed us to get a better picture of how these need to be adapted to ensure that peer support thrives and becomes embedded at SRUC. As such, in year 3 we plan to review this key element of the digitisation of peer support to ensure that it best meets its key purposes: staff and student engagement, training of volunteers, disseminating information about the groups and explaining how students can get involved.

As the Moodle page is one of the core digital elements underpinning all groups, time and attention should be devoted to ensuring that it conveys information as clearly as possible, in a way that is engaging, concise and in line with Moodle and accessibility standards. Likewise, the training given to volunteers is one of the core quality assurance and confidence-building mechanisms associated with project 3. As such, it should be reviewed to ensure that we are giving our volunteers the right information, with enough detail, and in such a way that they are encouraged to be autonomous and try things out.

On-Campus Delivery

Whilst the digital element is crucial, across many of our core surveys (e.g., NSS, SSES) scores for student community were low in 2022. This, combined with feedback from staff and students, has encouraged us to think about how we can make use of face-to-face visits. One of the primary expected benefits of attending campuses (where possible) is that it will facilitate relationship-building and remove some of the barriers or anxieties students might face putting themselves forward for volunteering in an online space.

Building relationships with staff and students will be key for the success of the peer support project is based on prior experiences of CELT as a department, where having a strong

relationship with staff is crucial to successful development work. Attending face-to-face meetings at core times like welcome week (an important recruitment opportunity) will hopefully help to build relationships with students, encouraging them to volunteer and to seek support once they are in the role. This ongoing dialogue is vital for quality assurance, sustainability, and the volunteer experience.

Likewise, face-to-face conversations with staff will help to promote a better understanding of what peer support is, what they can do to support it, and how they can move towards autonomy. Building these relationships between CELT and subject staff is key, as staff play a huge role in the support and sustainability of the peer support groups.

Blended Peer Support

Trialling on-campus activities which sit beside the digital peer support offering is based on very similar grounds to those outlined above. Student and staff feedback has indicated that more on-campus activities would be desirable. For those groups which are large enough, we want to see if they could run digital activities (which will be open to students from any campus, and which facilitate a sense of a wider SRUC community), whilst also empowering volunteers to run on-campus activities (to help to enhance the student experience and provide a richer set of activities for students to get involved with).

If this works well, then each peer support group could be broad, with 'off-shoots' coordinating specific online and campus delivery. This could help to broaden out and diversify the activities each group could run, ultimately leading to a wider and more varied impact on the student experience and learning communities.

Community of Volunteers

For many of the reasons identified in the Year Tutor research from year 2, there are substantial benefits associated with providing a supportive community of practice for those engaged in a specific role, in different subject areas. Establishing a community of volunteers would enable us to share best practice and encourage volunteers to collectively problem solve, promoting autonomy and enhancing the quality of the groups. This would also be a good example of authentic learning for workplace skills for our volunteers, as it replicates how problems might be solved within an organisation or within a sector.

Promoting Autonomy

Promoting autonomy is key to our model, as it allows us to empower staff and students to run their own groups. This ensures sustainability and means that CELT staff are able to utilise their time supporting new projects or carrying out enhancement work for all of our groups.

What difference will hopefully occur as a result? (Tangible change envisaged)

- Positive feedback from student volunteers and staff on the new training module. Feedback will be sought from existing volunteers, as well as new volunteers upon completion
- Updates made to training module following feedback from CELT staff
- Moodle course brought in line with Moodle and accessibility standards
- Greater volunteer confidence in creating their own resources (videos, logos, posters), with more being created and shared

- Increased volunteer confidence in promoting their sessions (e.g., providing content for the weekly newsletter, contacting SRUC marketing staff etc.)
- Volunteers more regularly contacting CELT and SRUC staff for support
- More groups started, with a higher number of volunteers
- Increased volunteer retainment
- More staff engagement in key processes like recruitment, planning and delivery
- Growth and embedding of peer support
- Higher staff and student awareness/ understanding

How will we know? (How the change is measured)

- Student attendee feedback (surveys, quotes)
- Staff feedback (conversations with staff contacts)
- Volunteer feedback (end of year volunteer survey, regular conversations)
- Number of groups
- Number of attempted but paused projects
- Number of volunteers
- Number of returning volunteers & sustainability of groups (e.g., a reduction in CELT staff time needed, increased engagement/ lead from subject staff)
- Number of notes of interest in volunteering/ groups
- Number of students with access to peer support
- Number of emails received by peer support inbox
- Resources created by volunteers (logos, examples of good practice)
- Number of requests for groups from staff, and number of invites to speak at key recruitment times like welcome week
- Number of meetings with volunteers and staff throughout the year
- Students and staff being proactive in key group activities such as planning, recruitment, delivery, and evaluation. For instance, where these processes are initiated/ led by staff/ students, and not CELT

Dissemination of work

How will you promote and communicate your work internally and externally?

Internal:

In the previous 2 years we have identified several comms mechanisms that have been effective for disseminating work about the Enhancement Themes. As such we plan to utilise them again for Year 3. These include staff blogs, updates at staff forums and the Enhancement Themes intranet page. The Institutional Theme Group members 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.

However, the ETIG review of our Year 2 activities also identified some areas for improvement. It was noted that short presentations to staff should sit alongside electronic communication to boost engagement. The regularity of staff blogs should also increase, summarising any reports and plans that we create for QAA. Staff who have been active participants in the projects will be emailed specifically, so that they are able to be involved in/ see the implementation of their contributions. Key findings and plans from the Enhancement Themes work will be incorporated into staff development sessions (such as the Accessibility project

within Moodle). Updates will be shared on GBOM (our Moodle training package for staff) and via Moodle Hive. Finally, we plan to make better use of existing networks/ publications, such as our weekly staff newsletter and our alumni magazine.

It was identified that we need to do more to engage students in the Enhancement Theme work. Plans include the creation of a short video to summarise the work underway on each of the projects, which could also be shared with staff. Other strategies include regular posts on Moodle, and updates via our student-facing social media channels. We plan to engage students who have contributed to the Enhancement Theme projects directly, working with them to share the resources they have created and raise awareness of their work.

One suggestion that was raised in the Year 2 review exercise was that a review of the ETIG is needed for Year 3. Much of the Year 1 and 2 work has been embedded in SRUC's strategic focus (i.e., projects identified through wider activities, Annual Quality Dialogues, Institution-led Reviews etc.). However, it was suggested that we might get more support if we reflected on how the ETIG group functions. This is something that we will address this year. For instance, by sourcing wider SRUC representation on the group.

The Year 2 review exercise noted that any dissemination of findings will need to be accessible, particularly given the content of our projects.

External:

Several external comms methods have been trialled in Years 1 and 2 and proved effective. These include promotion at CDN, discussions with Theme Reps and staff from other institutions and delivery of presentations to other organisations (e.g., via Landex and Education Scotland).

However, the review of Year 2 identified other methods whereby we can promote and disseminate our work. For instance, updates on project 3 could be shared with the Scottish Peer Support Network. Good practice from this network could also be identified and incorporated into our work going forward (to ensure the sustainability and continual enhancement of the project after the Theme ends). Further, opportunities for recognition could be sought by putting our work forward for consideration in various awards: both internal (e.g., SRUCSA awards), and external (Sparqs student engagement awards).

It was also suggested that the SRUCSA Co-President could get involved with the collaborative clusters in Year 3, and that we could link up with NAMSS (National Association of Managers of Student Support) and AMOSSHE.

Supporting staff and student engagement

How will you support your community to engage with planned activities?

Both staff and students will be encouraged to take part and engage in projects by supporting evaluation and feedback. This includes answering surveys and questionnaires, by taking part in face to face and remote meetings, and by using asynchronous collaboration tools like Padlet/JamBoard. Using multiple means of engagement will mean that staff and students can engage in the way best for them. We will use various communication mechanisms and engagement activities to promote how staff and students can be involved in future Enhancement Theme activities.

Given the high level of staff and student engagement in Years 1 and 2, we have reason to believe that our existing support and engagement strategies have been effective.

Many of the delivery activities for project 1 (student communities) focus explicitly on removing barriers to participation and encouraging student engagement.

To this end, the new society structure, review of key documentation and rewrite of the website should help to make it easier for students to get involved in this project. Support from SRUCSA staff will also be available.

Students who want to be involved in project 3 will be supported in a variety of ways. The training package will be improved and condensed, to ensure that volunteers have a better understanding of what peer support is and what is involved. We are fortunate to have several returning volunteers, who will be able to support staff in engaging our student community in the opportunity at induction and by designing their own promotional materials. For instance, all our welcome week promotion for the 4 returning groups will be led by volunteers, with SRUC staff for support. Finally, we have adapted the core model to make it less onerous for students, and to remove any barriers to participation that were identified. The new model retains the core ideals of peer support but provides numerous options for activities and mode of delivery, to suit student and volunteer needs.

Staff involved in the project will be supported to engage through CELT staff attending campuses (where possible) to promote relationship-building and to lead recruitment. The staff resources section on the Moodle page will also be updated according to feedback from some of our returning staff contacts.

The review exercise for the Year 2 activities identified that staff support, and regular meetings were invaluable for our student interns in terms of support and guidance, but also in guarding against any scope creep. One additional bonus following a request from Student Interns is that they want to establish an alumni network. This will help to maintain and continue these valuable student communities, and to promote ongoing learning and development.

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