

Correspondence from Professor Wayne Powell, Principal and Chief Executive of SRUC, dated 20 February 2026

Dear Convener,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Education, Children and Young People Committee on 14 January.

This letter includes further information.

I was grateful to you for passing on the feedback from your discussion with members of the Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs (SAYFC) Cultivating Leaders programme you had met at the Scottish Parliament.

While I am very sorry to hear that some of the feedback you heard about SRUC was not positive, I would be grateful if it was possible for you to provide me any specific examples you have, because I do take such concerns seriously and would like to be able to address them. SRUC holds regular meetings with SAYFC and we are continuing to offer our experts and resources through Young Farmer programmes.

My reference to a visit to our research farm at Easter Howgate was intended to refer to the NFUS Next Generation Committee, rather than the Cultivating Leaders Programme. On page 24 of your official report, Paul O’Kane refers to this as a discussion with “young farmers and NFU Scotland”.

Like the group you mentioned, the NFUS Next Generation Committee contains a number of former SRUC students, including its Chair, Ben McClymont, and I know that they thoroughly enjoyed the chance to speak with our scientists and to see some of our cutting edge research in person.

We take the experience and welfare of our students extremely seriously and they have regular opportunities to offer feedback and to highlight particular elements of their experience that they are not enjoying.

I have looked into the comment that “young farmers on the Rural Business Management course told us that lectures are cancelled on an almost weekly basis because their lecturers are being drawn away to support the Veterinary Medicine programme”.

Having asked the Rural Business Management (RBM) programme leader in Aberdeen to investigate, I can confirm the following:

1. Since the start of term in September 2025, no RBM lecturers have cancelled classes to teach Veterinary Medicine students. RBM staff have delivered a

small number of sessions to these students, but these had been timetabled well in advance and had no impact on the delivery by RBM staff to RBM students.

2. There is some input by Veterinary Medicine staff into optional modules that RBM students take, and again we can confirm that no sessions were cancelled by those staff. There was one week during a Livestock module where there was no session, but this was planned into the timetable.

Overall, the RBM programme has been delivered as timetabled. There were two occasions where a colleague delivered a session online due to illness, and a session was cancelled to allow students to attend an event.

In relation to our Elmwood Campus, you asked me “what had happened with the breakdown in communication and trust” with Elie and Earlsferry Community Council.

Before I address the specifics of the question, I am aware that we have had several communications with Elie & Earlsferry Community Council. We have also been responding to enquiries from Save Elmwood, which is comprised of some members of this community council, that come to us via local media.

I attended the meeting I believe you were referring to as being “cut short”. I can confirm that the meeting was not cut short.

This was the community workshop held at Elmwood on 27 November 2024 as part of what Elie & Earlsferry Community Council have referred to a “failed participation request”. This was not a “failed participation request”. SRUC fully participated in this request, following all legal requirements. As part of this request, SRUC facilitated a community workshop with a variety of community representatives. The outcomes are published as follows:

- [SRUC Decision Notice | SRUC](#)
- [Notice of modification of an outcome improvement process | SRUC Outcome Improvement Process Report | SRUC](#)

We continue to engage with the local community. One of my senior colleagues has had several conversations with Angela Anderson and other representatives from Save Elmwood since this meeting and Sir Ian Boyd will be speaking to them as part of [his study into growth opportunities in Fife](#).

The results of this study will be made available once the SRUC Board has held its meeting on 24 June.

We have made clear on a number of occasions that Elmwood remains an important part of the future of SRUC.

We were informed by the Education, Children and Young People Committee's administration team that Save Elmwood's submission arrived after the 6 January deadline and I was therefore unable to address some of its contents during the meeting.

On a more operational matter, Jeroen van Herk brought up the subject of students working outdoors at Oatridge not being able to have hot showers afterwards. While there have been no reported problems with hot water at Oatridge either to Estates or Residences teams, due to the condition and age of our residences estate – including the heating and boiler systems – there potentially could be an issue if a significant number of students tried to access hot water at same time. I have requested that my team look into and address this matter.

Following the discussion with John Mason MSP about pension schemes at SRUC, I can confirm that the £6m change in actuarial valuation movement was the combined total of all four pension schemes: three local government pension schemes and Citrus.

The majority of reserves stated in the SRUC accounts reflect committed grant funding within this total – protected funding for existing ring-fenced projects and not available for general working capital.

I note that, on page 15 of the official report of the meeting, Willie Rennie MSP is quoted as saying we have spent £21m at our Aberdeen Campus at Craibstone. I have set out below our expenditure at Craibstone, which is not £21m. Mr Rennie may have been referring to the £21m Digital Dairy Chain project in Dumfries & Galloway, which has been funded externally through the UKRI Strength in Places programme.

In terms of recent investment at our Aberdeen Campus, the new School of Veterinary Medicine and Biosciences has centred on team development and the validation and launch of the degree in Veterinary Medicine.

Since April 2022, £3.8m of costs and £800k of income have been recorded.

Capital investment at Craibstone has supported wider academic infrastructure, including:

- £900k – Clinical Skills Facility
£600k – lecture theatre and student experience
£900k – Tulloch Farm infrastructure
- In June 2025, the SRUC Board approved:
£400k large animal handling facility
£1.7m small animal clinic

A further £2m postmortem facility is pending approval, with an expected eight-year payback.

As promised to Paul O’Kane MSP, the breakdown – by country – of international students currently enrolled at SRUC are:

- Pakistan – 35
- India – 22
- Nepal – 11
- Nigeria – 6
- USA – 2
- Total – 76

Miles Briggs MSP asked what work SRUC had done to address the current shortage of farriers in Scotland.

SRUC delivers forgework pre-farriery training. We delivered accredited farriery training until 2008-09 when the previous Scottish apprenticeship and qualification framework was withdrawn. We are currently engaged with the farriery and wider equine sector in Scotland to make the case for the re-establishment of a farriery qualification framework and associated funding for farriery education. We are well placed to design, develop and deliver future farriery training in collaboration with the industry and will continue to work with relevant Scottish education and funding agencies to take this forward.

I was also asked about an email I sent to all SRUC staff about the need to make £5 million of staffing cuts. I can confirm this email was sent on 10 July 2024 and I have attached it for your reference.

We note that Save Elmwood made a further [submission on 19 January](#). If the Committee would like us to set out the accurate factual position in relation to the assertions they have made, we will be happy to do so, though I can readily confirm that we do have a Chief Financial Officer and that there are suitably qualified individuals on the SRUC Board.

I trust you will find this letter helpful but please don’t hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

Best wishes

Professor Wayne Powell BSc, MSc, PhD, DSc, FLSW, FRSE

Principal and Chief Executive

Appendix: Email from Professor Wayne Powell to all staff at SRUC, dated 10 July 2024

Dear Colleagues,

I know that many of you will now be taking some well-earned leave following a highly successful academic year, culminating in a brilliant Royal Highland Show. Last week marked the election of a new Government in Westminster and we await formal notification of our Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP)-one of the most significant steps forward in the history of SRUC and its founding Institutions.

Against this backdrop of achievement I want to update you on our financial position and to set out the positive steps we are taking to ensure that we fully embrace and capture the outstanding potential of TDAP.

Like many organisations in the sector we are adapting to ensure financial and operational alignment, in support of our plans and ambitions. We have already made good progress. The Scottish Funding Council understand and appreciate our unique role, particularly in rural Scotland, in supporting the future of people, communities and businesses. They have given a strong endorsement of our approach and are providing excellent support.

Following our Board meeting last week, I am able to share with you our planned overall financial position over the next three years. We have a positive trajectory and will move from a projected deficit position in 24/25 of £6.8 million to a modest surplus of over £200K in 25/26, with a projected growth in surplus of £2.2m in 26/27. But we need to take steps to achieve this outcome.

That is why we will, over the next 12 months, work to reduce our current staff costs of £60m to £55m and reduce our operational costs (non-staff costs) by £3m to approximately £36m. Reducing our staff costs will in part be achieved by not filling vacant positions and restricting new appointments to business-critical roles. However, in order to achieve an overall financially sustainable position we will need to implement staff reductions. Alongside this we are already implementing operational savings in travel, rationalisation of our estate and farms together with minimising our consumables expenditure.

I do appreciate that this news may be unsettling but wish to reassure you all that we have an achievable and feasible plan that will ensure the long-term viability of SRUC. Implementing this plan will require significant focus, empathy, integrity and commitment but I am confident that SRUC has the capacity, capability and resilience to thrive long into the future. We will share more information in due course.

Over the next few weeks, I and ELT colleagues shall be visiting all our campuses and will be available to meet with as many of you as possible in person.

Best wishes,
Wayne Powell