

The Northeast Fife Growth Study

1. What would you see as being the future strategic role of SRUC's Fife presence (delivered from its Elmwood campus) within (a) the local community; (b) SRUC; and (c) Scotland?

Strategic Role

a) Local Community

The SRUC in its strategic and leadership role should assist within the local community in creating a new vision for Elmwood College, and **Build Back Better** through a **Transformation program**, which ensures that Elmwood College becomes once more the vital, vibrant and sustainable Further Education (FE) hub that it was before the merger with the other 3 colleges, with every effort made to ensure that Elmwood College becomes and remains a vital source of regional land-based education and training. The creation of this new strategy and vision will ensure that the staff and students at Elmwood move from being disengaged to engaged.

The UHI which is currently undertaking a Transformation program, is in discussions with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) over funding to support their change program. The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) is Scotland's youngest university and a globally recognised leader in tertiary education. UHI's mission is to have a transformational impact on the people, communities and economy of their regions.

The SRUC should ensure through its Transformation program, equal provision of at Elmwood Campus of both Further Education practical vocational skills and education and Higher Education undergraduate and postgraduate degrees courses. Along with the newly acquired university status, this will offer the possibility of a smooth transition along the learning curve from Further Education (FE) to Higher Education (HE), but Higher Education provision should not take precedence over the provision on site of Further Education vocational skills education and training, which is fundamental and non-negotiable to meeting learner and workforce needs.

Within the UK, over 700,000 university graduates are now out of work and claiming benefits, according to new analysis. The research by the Centre for Social Justice raises fresh questions about Britain's long-standing assumption that university should be the default route for young people. The findings, drawn from analysis of the Labour Force Survey and Department for Work and Pensions data, show that graduate joblessness is significantly higher than previously reported as more degree-holders are ending up at the jobcentre.

The think tank, founded by Sir Iain Duncan Smith, says **the figures expose the consequences of an education system that has been "obsessed" with expanding university participation without sufficient regard to labour market demand, earnings outcomes or routes into skilled work.**

Its new report, [Rewiring Education](#)¹, argues that Britain's education system is profoundly unbalanced and needs to be comprehensively rewired.

It warns that treating technical education as a second-class path has left both the education system and jobs market badly distorted, with many graduates chasing unattainable jobs as employers struggle to recruit people with practical and technical skills. The study's findings underscore the need for a more balanced education system that includes vocational training alongside university courses.

The *Rewiring Education* report states - "While academic schooling in this country has a deep and rich inheritance, with some of the greatest schools and universities in the world, **we have been left with a profoundly unbalanced education system, where the academic pathway dominates and the technical pathway has been marginalised, misunderstood, and underappreciated.**

We have too many graduates. The OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) has advised that 37 per cent of graduates are over-qualified for their jobs and graduates from universities outside the top 20 are twice as likely to be in low skilled work as those from inside the top 20. Accordingly, we also have serious skills shortages. Nearly half of vacancies in the construction sector and skilled trades are the result of skills shortages.

We need to comprehensively rewire technical education, and doing so means understanding its purpose and value. Shaped by industry, tailored regionally, simple and clear, prioritised earlier, and based on what works.

Reform of this scale will take energy, focus and time. But a better future for millions of young people, and a more resilient British economy, is the prize for getting it right.

Vocational education training (VET)² has become an increasingly popular alternative to traditional university education. As the job market evolves, many students and professionals consider VET a viable pathway to gain practical skills and enter the workforce more quickly. Vocational training typically consists of practical, hands-on learning tailored to equip individuals with the precise skills required for success in their chosen professions. Unlike traditional academic pathways, which often stress theoretical knowledge, VET programs are designed to provide hands-on experience and specialised training. As industries evolve and the demand for skilled workers increases, VET has gained traction as a valuable educational option. These courses have for many years sat at the core of educational provision at Elmwood.

Vocational programs are typically shorter than traditional academic programs. Diplomas can be finished faster, sometimes within a year, whereas associate degrees require one to two years. This means that students can start making money sooner than their university bound counterparts.

According to the National Centre for Education Statistics, the average time to complete a vocational program is around 18 months, compared to four years for a bachelor's degree. Vocational education is also generally more affordable and accessible than traditional academic programs. The average cost of completing

¹ [Rewiring Education](#)

² [Vocational education training \(VET\)](#)

vocational education training can be equivalent to just one year at a university. This contributes to financial savings experienced by students during their education, allowing them to begin building their savings and establishing their financial security faster.

Online provision should be available for students who are already in employment, but this should not be the main focus of provision. Face-to-face teaching must remain the core and dominant mode of delivery. While online provision may be appropriate for a limited cohort of digitally competent learners who are already in employment, it should only ever play a supporting role.

The Cambridge Home School Online states that “between 2007 and 2019, the percentage of UK adults participating in online courses jumped from 4% to 17%”. This includes online university degrees and other online courses but with this increase comes challenges.

The job-related challenges include limited time to study, schedule conflicts and work overload. Other challenges include the study environment and technology issues. Oxford Learning College also discovered that **53.4% of students found it difficult as there was less in person support when learning online**. Online learning comes with many accessible and flexible options; however, these may not be accessible for disabled learners. It is important to note that over **43% of children leaving school now have additional support needs**. With its past focus on Further Education provision and provision of support to students, Elwood is well placed to assist in this Transformation Program and reform of the system.

b) SRUC

Within the SRUC, the financial challenges facing the SRUC on its current trajectory are considerable. As a result of this, there has been a growing concern within the local community that the **SRUC has not been a good steward of the community assets** it received in the regionalisation reforms. The perception has been of managed decline, lack of local/regional leadership and missed opportunities to make the most of Elmwood's strategic position both economically and reputationally:

Elie & Earlsferry Community Council's Participation Request: Interim and Final Reports.

We believe this calls for a major rethink in terms of the SRUC's strategy in moving forwards, and in its financial management and decision-making, with the creation of a Transformation and Outcome Improvement program to enable the creation of a sustainable financial future for both the SRUC and Elmwood campus in Northeast Fife

The dedicated transformation team should consist of innovators, strategists and implementers. The innovators will be involved in generating ideas and challenging the status quo. The strategists will assist with turning ideas into strategy and the implementers will be expected to continuously implement the new ideas and polish the strategy. The learning from this transformation change program can be shared with the teams at the other SRUC sites throughout Scotland and help position the SRUC for success.

c) Scotland

Within Scotland, the same issues and solutions are pertinent. The aims and objectives of this SRUC change program should therefore focus on enabling people across Scotland to learn and flourish, generating new ideas, diffusing knowledge and building a responsive coherent sustainable system of tertiary education and skills acquisition within the land-based sector that will transform social and economic prosperity, well-being and environmental sustainability at regional and national level through place-based investment.

A renewed focus on FE provision at all the SRUC sites within Scotland, will help to close the skills gap in the land-based workforce. A lack of skilled staff is also a problem throughout Scotland in other industries such as the Ayrshire-based rail maintenance firm [Brodie Engineering](#). Brodie, refurbishes and repairs trains for operators such as [ScotRail](#) and Northern Line from its depots, which are located on the rail network.

The business owners expressed significant concern over their ability to recruit people with the specialised skills and potential the company needs. This is despite Brodie Engineering offering people the chance to develop rewarding careers in roles such as engineering, project management, fitting and welding. Recruitment is seen as the “biggest issue” facing the company and outlined the difficulty Brodie has faced in finding access to local college places that can teach people the skills it needs.

It would seem that Brodie Engineering is not alone in facing such challenges. The Herald revealed that workers at the Govan and Scotstoun shipyards of defence giant BAE Systems have become concerned over the company’s “over-reliance” on hundreds of workers from overseas, including tradespeople from South Africa, the Philippines, Poland and Romania.

The same systemic failure is however now entrenched across land-based services. Elmwood College, which merged with Oatridge, Barony and the Scottish Agricultural College in 2012 to form the Scottish Rural College (SRUC), was at that time a thriving, successful and financially sound Further Education (FE) institution, educating more than 3,000 students. It delivered high-quality, vocationally focused FE provision and, critically, maintained robust access and introductory pathways that enabled learners from all backgrounds to enter land-based education and progress into skilled employment.

In the years since the merger, those commitments have been steadily dismantled. Access and introductory courses have been eliminated, FE provision has been systematically reduced, withdrawn or placed in prolonged suspension, and the emphasis has shifted decisively away from practical skills education. We believe that this has not been an accident of circumstance, but the consequence of sustained asset and resource stripping that has hollowed out the college’s capacity to deliver its core FE mission.

The sale of the Cupar farm, where students acquired essential, hands-on experience in agriculture and large-animal care, stands as a stark and irreversible example of this decline. The loss of this facility has fundamentally undermined the delivery of work-ready training and severed a critical link between education and the rural economy it was meant to serve.

What remains today is a shadow institution, falling far short of both its pre-merger strength and the assurances given at the time of consolidation. The erosion of FE pathways, the removal of entry-level opportunities, and the depletion of physical and teaching resources have collectively damaged learner access, regional skills development, and workforce sustainability. In our opinion, this contraction of provision, will have **long-term consequences for land-based education and the rural communities across Scotland.**

We believe that further evidence of this sustained dismantling can be seen in the closure and disposal of core educational facilities. The Elmwood college golf course, which supported between 30 and 50 students each year studying greenkeeping and golf course management, was placed on the market, removing a long-established and industry-aligned training pathway. The Animal Care Unit, which delivered Further Education courses in Animal Care, was shut down entirely, eliminating another vital vocational route.

The main building at Elmwood that housed FE provision in Horticulture, a Laboratory, Gamekeeping and Estates Management has also been closed, with classrooms now lying empty and unused. These closures represent not temporary measures, but the effective abandonment of a significant amount of FE land-based education on the site.

Student-assisted accommodation was first reduced by half and then removed completely, with only one month's notice. This decision dismantled a highly valued and essential facility that had enabled many young disabled learners, with Elmwood's support, to study, live and work independently while remaining close to their home communities and families. The removal of this provision has had a profound and lasting impact on learner access, inclusion and equality of opportunity.

We believe that the vital FE provision at Elmwood Campus in Fife and at its other campuses across Scotland has been surgically reduced **in the SRUC's centralising, cost-cutting moves to have 2 schools, one in Edinburgh and one in Aberdeen.** Also, it would seem that University status and Higher Education (HE) provision is seen as the Holy Grail whereas FE and vocational skills are seen as leading to lower paid and part time work.

Yet, the Final Report of the Career Review: Skills and Experiences to Grow in a Rapidly Changing World (March 2023), identified the need to more firmly embed the world of work and the principles of fair work in the experiences, skills and knowledge accessible to everyone, irrespective of their circumstances, in their journey through education into work.

In our opinion, a fundamental change in direction by the SRUC is required to correct the persistent imbalance between Further and Higher Education provision and to ensure genuine equity and parity in the student experience. Further Education must no longer be treated as secondary to Higher Education in terms of priority, investment or status. Valuing, resourcing and delivering FE provision on an equal footing with HE across Scotland and within Elmwood campus is critical to addressing the national shortage of skilled and work-ready individuals and to providing learners with fair access to sustainable employment and rewarding careers.

Previously, Elmwood also differentiated itself from the other SRUC sites around Scotland through the support and nurturing of students with learning difficulties and mental health issues, something which is needed now more than ever with an **increase in the number of students within Scotland requiring support (43% of school leavers)**. It is essential that this support is delivered in person and not on-line or over the telephone.

Learners may have additional support needs for a wide range of reasons. These may include an unsuitable learning environment, disability or health conditions, family circumstances that impact learning, or social and emotional challenges. Recognising and responding to these needs is not optional; it is a legal requirement within Scotland.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (the ASL Act) places a statutory duty on education providers to identify, assess, and provide appropriate support to learners who require additional help to benefit fully from education. In addition, the Equality Act 2010 requires institutions to anticipate the needs of disabled learners and to make reasonable adjustments to prevent them being placed at a substantial disadvantage compared with their peers. Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), public bodies, including educational institutions, are legally obliged to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations for protected groups, including learners with disabilities.

Introductory and access courses, alongside inclusive entry models and supported progression pathways, are a practical and essential mechanism for fulfilling these statutory duties. They enable learners to build confidence, develop independence, and establish a sense of belonging, while ensuring equitable access to education, progression, and future employment.

The removal or absence of such provision not only limits opportunity and undermines learner outcomes but also creates a direct risk of non-compliance with both the ASL Act and the Equality Act 2010, including the PSED (Public Sector Equality Duty). Without inclusive pathways, reasonable adjustments, and flexible access arrangements, learners with additional support needs may be unfairly excluded from participation, progression, and attainment, resulting in inequitable experiences and outcomes.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is Scotland's long standing, national commitment to provide all children, young people and their families with the right support at the right time, so that every child and young person can reach their full potential. In addition, the ***No One Left Behind*** programme is a strategic initiative in Scotland aimed at transforming employment support to ensure individuals, particularly those facing barriers receive tailored assistance in their journey towards sustainable employment.

A further issue revolves around the SRUC seeking to eventually place all courses on-line. Yet too much screen time may have had a negative effect on the brains of school children. New government research indicates that increased screen time

may be linked to longer lasting effects on children and teenagers than on adults (Children of the 2020s (COT20s):³

Attention span and focus – an increase in social media time has been linked to an increase in inattention; problems in focusing for a longer period of time; getting easily distracted and not completing homework.

Mood and Mental Health- teenagers and children who spend more than 4 hours per day on screens are more likely to experience higher levels of anxiety and depression. Less face-to-face and direct interaction means fewer opportunities and chances to practice important social and executive skills

Problem solving, skills and memory- constant distraction online means children are often deprived of the ability to focus for a longer time and missing out on cognitive challenges that drive and benefit cognitive development which includes both attention and working memory.

When evidence already exists of the huge negative impact this has had on children's and teenager's brains, we believe that **the availability across Scotland of on-site training and the acquisition of practical vocational skills in a setting where there is social mixing of learners and employees is the way forward**. The alternative i.e. online provision of courses will just lead to a further increase in the negative impact of social isolation on the developing brains of young learners. Online provision should therefore just be an added extra facility where appropriate.

The Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2023) which was co-designed with students and staff, has already flagged up the issues encountered by today's students and the need for these to be addressed. The SRUC Students' Association Co-Presidents have known that **(There is No Health Without Mental Health (Prince et al., 2007; Department of Health, 2011))**.

“Just as we must invest time, care, and attention to achieve a successful harvest or a positive outcome on a conservation or animal-based project, so too must we invest in our mental health and wellbeing. Never has there been a time more demanding for SRUC students than the world we live in today. We have survived a global pandemic, are weathering the impact of the Ukrainian war, and enduring the cost-of-living crisis. Underpinning all of these and other local, national, and global stressors is the ongoing threat to our daily lives posed by climate change. It is no wonder that students across the UK, in further education, apprenticeships, and higher education are amid a mental health crisis (Mental Health Foundation Scotland, 2022).”

“Let's lay bare the facts. **Almost two thirds of Scottish college students experience low wellbeing, and a staggering 54% of us experience at least moderate symptoms of depression** (Mental Health Foundation Scotland, 2022). Research also tells us that we are at even greater risk of mental health challenges simply because of the subjects we study (Kelly, 2017). Our educational focus on rural, environmental, and land-based disciplines means that during our studies

³ (Children of the 2020s (COT20s):

we are exposed more often to the evidence of climate change and the associated impacts on our everyday lives (Clayton, 2018; Wallace, 2020; Kluttz, 2020).”

Yet the current situation at Elmwood appears to be fundamentally at odds with the principles set out in the College’s Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy, as shown by the low level of staff morale across all the SRUC sites, highlighted in the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into the SRUC. In our opinion there is a clear and concerning disconnect between the decisions of the SRUC and the organisation’s stated moral, ethical, and strategic commitments.

It is therefore imperative that, as the SRUC and Elmwood move forward, SRUC prioritises the provision of appropriate, accessible, and inclusive services and interventions at all its sites throughout Scotland. Equally important is the creation and maintenance of an organisational culture and learning environment that actively supports the wellbeing of both students and staff, ensuring that educational delivery aligns with the institution’s stated values and obligations.

2. What are the top three subjects which SRUC should invest in within Northeast Fife, what are the challenges they would address and what outcomes would you envisage from those investments?

We feel that limiting this to 3 subjects is unnecessarily restrictive, so we have included the courses we feel should be provided at Elmwood when moving forwards.

a) Animal Care provision.

Depleting animal care education and skills acquisition throughout Scotland except for the one base at Aberdeen could leave the country in a perilous situation. Animal care education and skills acquisition are crucial for maintaining the safety and well-being of both the animal populations and humans. Proper education helps prevent the spread of diseases, ensures responsible ownership and handling, and protects the environment from invasive species.

Disease Prevention and Control involve understanding basic animal hygiene, vaccination schedules, and the signs of illness. **This is essential for preventing the spread of infectious diseases, including zoonotic diseases that can pass to humans.**

The agricultural industry is also one of the most dangerous in the country. **Across Great Britain, in 2024-25, the sector had 23 worker fatalities.** This is about 18.5% of all work-related deaths for this period. Incidents involving moving machinery and vehicles are one of the most common causes of worker-related deaths in the industry. Workers may be using heavy machinery or vehicles, working with livestock or isolated when carrying out tasks. **Deaths or serious injuries to agricultural workers can occur due to inadequate training or guidance.** (Courier: 24 January 2024- Paddy O’Donnell – Fatal accident inquiries help guide safe farming practices). Reinstating Animal Care education and skills acquisition in a new ACU at Elmwood and maintaining the animal care units at the other sites would assist in preventing the spread of diseases throughout the

Scotland's regions, maintain the well-being of the animal population and reduce the number of fatal accidents in agricultural workers.

b) Horticulture

Horticulture is already well established at Elmwood, and this provision should continue with closer links established with the local schools. Research has shown that young learners benefit greatly from outdoor learning. '**Learning outdoors**' has long been recognised as vital for wellbeing as well as an effective strategy to support environmental and related **Learning for Sustainability** (LfS) education in early years and primary school.

In the NFU's 2023 Annual Report there was again a focus on skills provision and Land-Based Learning. They put forward key issues they had identified to the Government's Commission reviewing Land-Based Learning and the Independent Skills Review⁴. The report noted that across the Sector, **businesses are experiencing workforce shortages and struggling to recruit.**

Given their importance in terms of food and materials production, addressing the nature and climate crises and supporting rural communities and the economy, it will be important to attract more entrants, widen the pool of applicants, and increase training opportunities.

But the report also noted that it isn't just about recruitment, **there is however a lack of consistency in the access of learners to opportunities to engage with learning outdoors, particularly within secondary schools.** There is a need to establish clear progressive experiences for nature-based learning across all levels of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE).

The report on the FE Curriculum for Northeast Fife (2017) identified a sustained and healthy demand for Further Education Skills in NE Fife and suggested there would therefore appear to be the potential to create an enhanced provision of FE in the north of NE Fife. It noted that there is a demand for FE provision in NE Fife over and above the current provision at Elmwood campus. This is of the order of 400 FTE students per annum and sufficient to justify the production of a business case for a new development.

Of the forecast demand for 16,000 replacement jobs, the number requiring FE qualifications between 2016 and 2024 is estimated to be in the region of 6,000 or roughly 750 per year. This is nearly 4 times the current number of school leavers in NE Fife who currently go into FE each year (about 200) suggesting a high demand for those with relevant FE qualifications.

The report asserted there may be scope for a Joint School/Further Education Facility and Cupar would be the preferred location for such a facility. This could strengthen the relationship with Bell Baxter High School and provide a highly accessible resource for the community in Cupar. In addition, the provision of FE locally in NE Fife is seen as a key part of the economic health of Cupar and an important contribution to further strengthen the economic assets of the area, notably in terms of tourism and hospitality (with a specific focus on golf-related

⁴ Land-Based Learning and the Independent Skills Review 2023

tourism). It was thought that funding might be available in 3-4 years' time to support this. **Building a local curriculum on the basis of employer and student needs will complement the local economic development strategy.** Though the Bell Baxter site itself is constrained by parking and playing areas a development on part of the existing Elmwood site may be possible.

With Cupar identified as a strategic development area, 1,400 new houses are planned for Cupar North, which will create additional demand on local education provision, including an expected increase of approximately 350 pupils. Bell Baxter High School may face capacity challenges as a result, which presents a significant opportunity for a joint development initiative with Elmwood College.

A community-based approach could provide flexible learning opportunities tailored to meet the needs of all learners, including part-time, full-time, work-based, and blended learning options. This model would ensure that provision is inclusive of learners who may not yet have the digital competency, high attainment levels, or confidence to engage fully in conventional higher-level courses. Evening and weekend sessions could be delivered locally, providing practical access for students who might otherwise face barriers due to travel, family commitments, or work.

Taster courses delivered on Bell Baxter land could include lectures, discussions, and tutorial sessions designed to introduce students to the full range of subjects and vocational pathways available at Elmwood College. These sessions would allow learners to experience the courses before formally applying, ensuring informed course selection and increasing the likelihood of successful engagement and progression. This approach addresses the historic issue of students regretting their course choices due to insufficient early exposure.

Such a community-based model would also respond directly to the concerns raised by pupils at Bell Baxter in the FE Curriculum for NE Fife. Those pupils expressed strong opposition to a shared high school-college campus, citing cultural differences and differing practices and policies around issues such as smoking, uniforms, and teaching styles.

Many students were seeking a distinct learning environment separate from school routines, and a community-based taster programme would provide an appealing, independent introduction to further education without merging school and college environments. By delivering accessible, flexible, and inclusive horticultural learning opportunities within the community, SRUC can ensure equity of access, broaden participation, and strengthen progression pathways, while aligning with strategic growth in Cupar and the needs of the local population.

c) Gamekeeping/estates management

With the large increase in the number of deer following the Covid pandemic it is vital that gamekeeping courses continue to be provided at Elmwood campus. **The large and increasing number of deer in Scotland (estimated at nearly one million across all species) is widely considered to be a significant problem,**

causing substantial ecological, economic, and public safety issues. Due to a lack of natural predators, deer populations are currently unsustainably high and require active management.

High densities of deer overgraze young trees, preventing the natural regeneration and expansion of native woodlands, including the rare Caledonian forest fragments and Scotland's rainforest. This heavy browsing and trampling also damages internationally important peatlands and other vulnerable habitats, which play a vital role in storing carbon and supporting biodiversity. By hindering the growth of forests and damaging peatlands, high deer numbers undermine Scotland's ability to meet its carbon sequestration and net-zero targets.

When populations exceed the capacity of the environment to support them, deer themselves suffer from a lack of food and shelter, which can lead to starvation and disease, particularly during harsh winters. Damage to commercial forestry and agricultural crops results in significant financial losses, estimated at millions of pounds annually. The number of deer-vehicle collisions on Scotland's roads is high and has been increasing, posing a risk of injury and death. High deer numbers can also contribute to the rise in tick populations, increasing the risk of diseases like Lyme disease in human.

In response to these issues, the Scottish Government and conservation bodies like NatureScot are implementing measures, including increased culling and a focus on "fit and competent" management, to reduce deer numbers to ecologically sustainable levels. Deer are usually found on the private estates throughout Scotland. The provision of these courses at Elmwood will ensure there are sufficient staff trained in estate management and Gamekeeping to help provide support to the estate owners who have responsibility for effectively managing the deer population.

d) Forestry

Scotland's forests which are mainly found on private estates, are crucial for combating climate change by absorbing CO₂, supporting huge biodiversity (like red squirrels, [pine martens](#)), purifying air and water, preventing floods, boosting the economy through timber and tourism, and providing vital spaces for recreation, health, and cultural heritage, with plans to increase woodland cover for future resilience. Pine martens are making a strong comeback in Scotland's forests, thriving in native woodlands and plantations, playing a key role in controlling invasive grey squirrels, and helping red squirrels by suppressing their main competitor and disease carrier. These elusive, cat-sized mustelids are protected, expanding their range, and their presence indicates healthy ecosystems, with conservation efforts like artificial dens supporting their slow recovery.

Cupar is also an area with few trees. Retaining and maintaining the ground at Elmwood where trees are grown would enable these trees to be transplanted at the appropriate time at sites throughout Cupar. Provision of forestry courses will enable learners to support the natural regeneration and expansion of native woodlands and enable Scotland to meet its carbon-sequestration and net-zero targets.

d) Greenkeeping and golf course management

Fife and Scotland have a history steeped in Golf. There are at the present time, 550 Golf courses in Scotland with many of the most famous courses found on the East and West coast of Scotland which could provide future employment for students with Green Keeping and Golf Course Management skills.

The original attempt at the sale of the Golf Course and the reduction in the number of land-based greenkeeping courses, has we believe resulted in a huge shortage of trained greenkeepers and staff with golf course management skills. Staff were advised and given notice that they were to be made redundant. This was reversed when the sale of the golf course fell through. However, we believe that concern over the future of the course has resulted in some staff leaving.

The marked local shortage of skilled green-keepers resulted in a resident in St Andrews who had trained at Elmwood, enquiring locally if the community thought he should start a scheme to locally train green-keepers.

The attempted sale of Elmwood's Golf Course and reduction in the number of land-based courses being provided at Elmwood made no sense to us at all. Scotland is the Home of Golf. **Over 50 of these courses which includes the world-famous Old Course in St Andrews are available in Fife where those trained in green-keeping and golf course management can obtain future employment.** In addition, the Golf Course at Cupar was the only course in Scotland offering Intro courses.

The move by the SRUC away from the original vision for Elmwood is very concerning and, in our opinion, this may result in a huge loss to the land-based golf course workforce. There may therefore be a missed opportunity in the marketplace to fill the gap in both the local and Scotland wide workforce needed to take on Greenkeeping and Golf Course Management skills.

Previous discussions which the SRUC had with the St Andrews Links Trust and Fife Golf Trust had not progressed. We believe that the reason for this was disclosed at a meeting with a non-executive director which followed the submission by Elie & Earlsferry Community Council of a Participation Request in March 2024 (Interim and Final Participation Request Reports).

We were advised that the golf course was to be sold, and the money obtained from the sale of the golf course, the sale of the agricultural land and farm at Elmwood and the sale of the Elmwood site at Cupar to a housing develop following the demolition of the main buildings at Cupar, would be used to reduce the SRUC's overall debt. The majority of this debt which in our opinion had been accrued through their activities at other sites across Scotland and its drive for university status, had increased from £6m to £9m and we were told there was a need to enable the SRUC to be financially sustainable.

However as there is currently still a huge shortage of trained greenkeepers, there is a great opportunity for Elmwood Golf Course to increase the number of students attending on-site courses and help address the current shortage of greenkeepers which exists throughout Scotland. An effective collaboration with the St Andrews Links Trust and Fife Golf Trust could also be explored.

e) Additional Courses that could be added or reinstated

These courses include Business Management, Commercial Development, Core Skills, Travel and Tourism (formerly Hospitality), Land-Based Engineering, and Digital Skills. In addition, it is important to reintroduce tailored Student Development courses designed to meet the needs of learners with disabilities or personalised support requirements, including those who may find studying in large groups challenging. This approach ensures that the full spectrum of learners is supported and able to engage meaningfully with education, providing equitable access to progression and career opportunities.

3. How should SRUC fund its future presence in Northeast Fife, in terms of (a) the capital investment needed to make its Elmwood campus into a first-class facility and (b) its operations at that campus and beyond.

Funding

Ring-fenced funding should be sought from the SFC to implement a Transformation change program which would explore the courses to be provided on site and also the use of the main building and the re-installation of an Animal Care Unit.

Sources of funding include:

- Scottish funding council (SFC)
- Fife Voluntary Action (FVA)
- Rural Housing Initiative
- City Region Deals
- UK shared Prosperity Fund
- Scottish Local Growth Fund
- Ringlink Scotland Ltd

Additional uses for funding

Main building

We are aware that the main building at Elmwood has a B grade listing. It was found to be notable for its modernist design, its material quality and the survival of original materials and features. The technical or vocational approach to further education is fundamentally a post-war concept and Elmwood College is seen as a major example of a multidiscipline tertiary educational facility of this period in Scotland. Because of this the B grade listing may not be removed. **We feel that with a creative and innovative approach to the use of the site, it could continue to act as a capability centre and hub of knowledge to encourage best practice and provide support and training for all students.**

SRUC and alternative uses for the main building

- SRUC could be a key strategic and operational partner in any alternative viability. A good outcome for SRUC could be the continuation of community lead facilities and provision of services from the main building. Students and staff could access shared facilities including catering and library to complement other site facilities. SRUC could pay a fraction of the current costs as a partner in any alternative arrangement.

Mixed used site potential stakeholders

- Fife Council Education Service

- The long-term future for Kilmarnon School and the potential of a move into the Elmwood building with all the advantages, opportunities and potential cost savings.
- Looking ahead to the future of secondary school provision/capacity at Bell Baxter High School in light of Cupar North Development and the potential for an entire floor or series of classrooms within Elmwood being utilised for exclusive school use, perhaps for a specific department or sixth form.

- Business & Economy

- Potential for enterprise office accommodation, hotdesking, co-location, meeting, business and public access facilities.
- Potential for lease or operation of student residences as budget tourism or temporary accommodation.
- Food and Drink Fife Network, Business Improvement
- University St Andrews, Open University learning hub. IT test centres.

- Health

- Exploring potential for the location and delivery of medical services, especially community based Mental Health services.
- Opportunity for a community run Horticultural Therapy Garden, looking after Elmwood grounds, working with council colleagues on Duffus Park and SRUC colleagues across the site.
- Potential for lease of an area of the building to a professional veterinary care provider.

- Culture and Community

- Provision of a base for Sustainable Cupar
- Provision of a dedicated home and teaching facility for University of the Third Age Cupar to help continue their fantastic development and expansion.
- Provision of a centre for community learning – based in the Elmwood main library.
- Potential of low-cost conversion of the current Elmwood sports hall into a cinema/screen space so that a big screen can be retained in NEF

- A community café, community lounge, meeting spaces and public facilities of significant scope and size to accommodate the general public and wide range of community activity.
- Potential for an expanded home for Cupar Heritage Trust and a heritage museum/attraction, perhaps located in the main hall.

Potential terms of reference

- Is there a future for Elmwood Campus Main Building, Residences and Grounds as part of a mixed-use site solution working in partnership with SRUC?
- Is this a desirable outcome and if so, what are the options and next steps in pursuing such an endeavour?

Retention of the West Wing (thus retaining current student numbers and income).

This would enable the previous level of activity and income to be maintained. The costs involved to make the existing structure sustainable, to remove gas heating, replace with electric, fix roof, install solar panels and wind turbine on roof etc. could be explored. The advantages include:

- It is an excellent facility which is sector leading
- It provides an excellent environment for teaching and animal accommodation
- SRUC has already invested significant funds in the facility
- There is scope to expand if required in the future

Placing a modular unit on site

This is an alternative option which should be explored. A modular unit could be placed on the site at Elmwood to accommodate a new Animal Care Unit. Construction cost of a modular building is approximately £1000.00 per m² so cost involved would be in the region of £465,000.00 (this is just 55% of the income the ACU can generate in one year).

Conclusion

Elmwood College has played a central role for many years in the provision of Further Education Courses for students in Fife. It had its origins in the 1940s when Bell Baxter continuation school delivered evening classes in agriculture, horticulture, engineering, business and general studies. Day release classes started in 1956 and Hope Park House and 5 acres of land were purchased in 1957.

Elmwood College has also proved to be a Centre of Excellence for students with additional support needs, who struggle with on-line and distance learning. With a creative and innovative approach to the use of the site, it could continue to act

as a capability centre and hub of knowledge to encourage best practice and provide support and training for all local students. In conclusion, **a new strategy is required to ensure that as Elmwood moves forward, it can provide the benefits to the local communities, industries and learners it was built to serve.**

In order to ***Build Back Better*** following the Covid 19 pandemic, the key findings of the Augar Review were that the economy needs people with the skills and education required to maintain prosperity and young people themselves need routes through education into decent, well-paid, secure employment. **The review also found that we need to get much better at providing technical and vocational education for a much wider group of young people and that we need good and effective alternatives to the traditional university route.**

The independent panel, chaired by Dr Philip Augar, made 53 comprehensive recommendations for the reform of the further and higher education sectors. “As proposed in the Augar Report, **we are striving for a more coherent and unified post-18 system in which technical routes are strengthened, and access is made more flexible and accessible for everyone at every stage of their life.**”⁵

We believe that the SRUC in its strategic and leadership role should assist in partnership with staff, students and key local stakeholders in creating a new vision for Elmwood Campus. This can be achieved through the creation of a Transformation change program with ring-fenced funding sought from the SFC. This will ensure that Elmwood becomes once more the vital and vibrant Further Education hub that it was before the merger with the other 3 colleges, but with the added bonus of HE provision being available, now that SRUC has obtained university status. Every effort should be made to ensure that Elmwood Campus becomes and remains a vital source of regional land-based education and training.

We will be happy to assist in that process.

Angela Anderson

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Hilary Lumsden: ex SAC student

Save Elmwood

23 February 2026

⁵ Interim Conclusion of the Review of Post18 Education and Funding: January 2021