

Submission

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To: ECYP Committee

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Education, Children and Young People Committee: NFUS Written Evidence - SRUC

NFU Scotland (NFUS) is the leading agricultural organisation in Scotland. Representing more than 9,000 farmers, growers, and crofters, our members provide and support thousands of jobs and deliver significant economic, social and environmental benefits across Scotland.

Agriculture is the lynchpin of rural Scotland and is an important part of Scotland's booming food and drink industry. Scottish agriculture generates a gross output of £3.3 billion annually. The farming and crofting sector is committed to sustainable food production, enhancing biodiversity and helping to tackle climate change.

- NFUS thanks the ECYP Committee for inviting us to give evidence on the financial sustainability of colleges and universities, and specifically Scotland's Rural College (SRUC). As the representative body for Scotland's farmers, crofters and growers, NFUS has a long-standing and close relationship with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and recognises its unique and nationally significant role.
- SRUC plays a vital role in:
 - Educating and training the current and future agricultural workforce;
 - Supporting innovation, productivity and sustainability through applied research;
 - Providing advisory and knowledge exchange services that directly benefit farm businesses and rural communities;

- Contributing to national priorities on food security, climate change, biodiversity and rural economic resilience; and
- Providing evidence for policy development for Government and other bodies, such as NFUS.
- The Committee heard previously from SRUC's Principal that long-term funding and policy recognition of SRUC's national role are essential. NFUS strongly supports this position.
- NFUS is concerned that the current funding model does not adequately reflect the complexity, cost base or national importance of SRUC's remit. Land-based education and research often require specialist facilities, practical training environments and close industry engagement, all of which carry higher costs than many traditional academic disciplines.
- Furthermore, short-term or uncertain funding arrangements risk undermining SRUC's ability to retain specialist staff and expertise, maintain high-quality teaching and research infrastructure; and plan strategically to meet future industry and policy needs.
- NFUS therefore believes that **long-term, stable funding** is essential to safeguard SRUC's contribution to Scotland's rural and agricultural sectors.
- The Scottish agricultural sector is undergoing rapid change, driven by technological innovation, climate and environmental pressures, and evolving policy frameworks. SRUC is central to equipping future entrants and existing farmers with the skills required to adapt and succeed.
- SRUC is fundamental in delivering the ambition of supporting the diversification and modernisation of courses, ensuring provision reflects future workforce needs, including digital skills, business management, sustainability and climate resilience; and strengthens pathways into land-based careers for young people and those transitioning into the sector.
- NFU Scotland urges the Committee to recognise SRUC's unique national role and the essential contribution it makes to Scotland's rural economy, food system and environmental objectives. Long-term, appropriately targeted funding and supportive policy frameworks are critical to ensuring SRUC can continue to fulfil its remit and respond effectively to future challenges.
- NFUS looks forward to continuing to work constructively with SRUC, the Scottish Government and the Committee to support a resilient and forward-looking land-based education and research system.