Introduction

Angus Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for written evidence on aspects of the above Bill. Taken together, Further (FE) and Higher (HE) Education provide the first post-school destination for more than two thirds of all leavers in Angus. Clearly changes to FE and HE funding may potentially impact on many Angus school leavers as well as the work of the Angus school-college partnership. As lead partner, Angus Council also has overall responsibility for effective management and delivery of Opportunities for All.

General Comments

Angus Council endorses the commitment to make post-16 education more focused on the needs of learners and employers. The imperative of ensuring Scotland’s FE and HE institutions are efficient, effective and fit for purpose, particularly in the current challenging economic context, is recognised. So too is the need to widen participation and improve equity of access to HE.

University governance

Drafting and introduction of a Scottish Code of Conduct is welcomed

Widening Access

The principle of widening access to HE and setting aspirational but realistic targets to increase the proportion of students from less affluent backgrounds is welcomed.

Tuition Fees Cap

The absence of fees for Scottish students is and should remain a welcome and positive aspect of the Scottish education system. Capping fees for those attending from other parts of the UK at a level equivalent to that elsewhere in the UK creates equity and neither favours or disadvantages potential students from out with Scotland.

It is important, particularly in the current economic climate, that access to a university place should not be or become dependent on ability to pay. Any restriction on access to HE for Scottish students not paying higher fees would be highly regrettable.
**College Regionalisation**

In principle, larger more diverse and efficient colleges are a positive development. However, in practice, recent changes to college funding for school-college partnerships have already restricted the range and volume of provision available to young people. It would be unwelcome if college regionalisation compounded this by diverting time, energy and money from core functions.

Similarly, there is an increasing need for schools and colleges to work in partnership to deliver the Senior phase of CfE. Such partnerships can broaden the range of opportunities and progression pathways available to the increasing number of young people staying on at school beyond the first statutory leaving date.

Better articulation between FE and HE is welcomed and should provide better recognition of prior learning and clearer progression from FE to the appropriate stage/level in HE.

Angus Council has enjoyed a very positive partnership with Angus College. This has allowed for effective joint planning and a welcome responsiveness to local circumstances. It would be regrettable if regionalisation made colleges less locally responsive / accountable. The creation of larger colleges operating across more than one Local Authority area will place new challenges and demands on these institutions in being as effective a contributor while sitting on more than one Community Planning Partnership with the potential for more diverse, if not conflicting, priorities and aspirations.

**Review of Fundable Higher and Further Education**

No comment

**Data Sharing**

The universal expectation to share data on all learning and training providers is welcomed.

It is agreed that improved data sharing arrangements, most notably for young people moving from one post-school destination to another, are needed as part of OfA. This is particularly crucial if a young person is moving from a positive to negative destination to ensure timely engagement and support.

At present, there are challenges in ensuring that the data retained in the 16+ national data hub is accurate and up-to-date. This would need to be addressed.

This arrangement would not improve matters for young people who enter a negative destination and choose not engage with SDS or those leaving employment.
Any commitment to data sharing needs to be comprehensive and embrace all sectors equitably. There may also be resource implications if the full range of partners is to be fully engaged in efficient data sharing.

There are some ethical concerns around data sharing that will need to be addressed. There is a clear linkage across from the post 16 learning sector to the benefits arena, where participation in learning activity can be compelled, with benefit removal where people opt not to comply. There are clear implications for choice and the quality of learning here.

There would also be a clear need for definition around what constitutes learning and therefore the scope of any duty. There will be young people who voluntarily participate at the more informal end of the learning spectrum, where data sharing may not be appropriate or practical; some definition or quantification may be required.