Lews Castle College UHI is an incorporated College under the terms of the 1992 Act. The College is also one of the 13 partners of the University of the Highlands and Island. Lews Castle College UHI is already a tertiary institution providing education and learning opportunities across the full range of the SCQF framework.

The Board of Management of Lews Castle College UHI supports the purpose Bill and the pursuit of better governance, wider access, coherent provision and effective delivery of further and higher education. The College is committed to these principles. The Board of management also welcomes the view that the Highlands and islands are distinctive and therefore require a solution which takes account of the unique characteristics which reflect the needs and aspirations of the communities of the Highlands and Islands.

While welcoming the recognition of the uniqueness of the Highlands and Islands we do not believe that the bill gives sufficient weight to the uniqueness of the solution required. Identifying UHI as the regional delivery body for Further Education is too simplistic a statement and requires more detailed consideration to ensure that the arrangements put in place do indeed deliver more effective delivery. UHI has been successful in achieving University status as a result of the activities of a partnership of autonomous bodies working together to deliver the required outcomes. While there are opportunities to achieve efficiencies in the partnership the proposals will diminish the autonomy of the Further Education in the Highlands and Islands and of the Academic Partner Colleges.

We feel that the proposals of the Working Group led by Dr Michael Foxley better reflected the needs of the area and that these have not been fully taken account of in the Bill as drafted.

The University of the Highlands is a partnership, a partnership of equals working together to deliver education in the Highlands and Islands. It works because the partners have a voice and can influence the direction of the partnership in delivering to the area as a whole. The Highlands and Islands ‘region’ consists of many differing communities and economic regions. The Colleges in the area have relationships with 8 Community Planning partnerships which are best developed at the Community level at which they operate. A more centralised structure could damage the good relationships which already exist with partners and some more consideration should be given to how this might be addressed. The governance issue for the Highlands and Islands area is less about strategic control than about ensuring that the sum of all the parts that make up the region, as identified in the Bill, is more than the simple aggregation of those parts. UHI has been established through such a partnership and its future success would benefit from development of this partnership of equals concept. The Bill takes
this development so far in recognising the unique opportunity offered by the Highlands and Islands but it oversimplifies the next step by assuming that a reconstituted UHI will, of itself without its autonomous partners, be sufficient to take the development to its next level.

Iain Macmillan
Principal and Chief Executive