University Governance: to allow Ministers when providing funding to the SFC to impose conditions relating to the need for higher education institutions to adhere to good practice in governance. The Highland Council supports this proposal and believes it will lead to the development of a more consistent, transparent, accountable model of governance.

Widening Access: to allow Ministers, when providing funding to the SFC, to impose at the level set conditions relating to access to higher education institutions for under-represented socio-economic groups. The Highland Council supports this proposal to improve opportunities for all but agrees with Universities Scotland that the pool of potential applicants from Scotland’s most deprived areas must be grown before there will be any significant improvement in widening access. To that end, the Council is committed to:

- tackling social, health and educational inequalities in the early years of children’s lives; and
- improving core literacy and numeracy skills from pre-school to the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence.

The Council requests that, in addition to the use of Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), that steps are taken to recognise the challenges of rural deprivation for potential students in large geographical areas such as Highland. The Council also recommends that a comprehensive study of the reasons for the relatively high dropout from university courses at the end of the first year (9.4%) is carried out in order to help schools to prepare university applicants for their studies.

Tuition Fees Cap: to allow Ministers:

- to set an upper limit on the level of higher education tuition fees which post-16 education bodies can charge UK students and certain others who are not entitled to be charged tuition fees at the level set by Scottish Government; and
- when providing funding to the SFC, to impose conditions with a view to ensuring that post-16 education bodies adhere to such an upper limit.

The Highland Council agrees with this proposal and notes the intention in Section 4 (3) (b) to cap the fees for students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland at the same maximum level as charged by institutions in the rest of the UK.
College Regionalisation

- to provide for two types of incorporated colleges with different duties, composition and appointment provisions, depending on whether they are in single-college or multi-college regions;
- to establish new regional strategic bodies for colleges in multi-college regions to support a regional approach to the planning and funding of college provision; and
- to introduce Ministerial powers to remove chairs and other members of incorporated colleges and regional boards for reasons of failure (in addition to mismanagement)

The Highland Council welcomes the proposal to establish new regional strategic bodies and commends the progress already made by Inverness College, North Highland College and West Highland College to work more closely for the benefit of students in the Highland area.

Review of Fundable Further and Higher Education - to allow the SFC to review the provision of fundable further and higher education with a view to ensuring that such education is being provided by post-16 education bodies in a coherent manner.

Taken with the proposal 4, The Highland Council welcomes plans to provide coherent provision between further / higher education and looks forward to working with the University of the Highlands and Islands and the associated colleges to this end. The result should be improved provision for school leavers and for lifelong learning.

Data Sharing – to allow Ministers to make secondary legislation to impose a legal duty on relevant bodies to share data with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) on all young people between the ages of 16 and 24 moving through the learning system to identify those who have disengaged with, or may be at risk of disengaging with, learning or training.

The Highland Council agrees with the need to ensure data is shared but recommends that the capacity of SDS to meet the career advice needs and coaching support for young people is kept under constant review.