Background

The Committee agreed that Members would undertake a number of visits to the bodies the Committee is scrutinising as part of its work prior to the budget being published. Liz Smith MSP and Colin Beattie MSP visited Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, (QMU) on 9 November 2016. The visit was organised by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

The Members met two students who had articulated from a course at Newbattle Abbey College to QMU. This was followed by a meeting with officials of the SFC.

Meeting with students

Both the students’ learning journeys were individual and particular to them. One student had left school after S4 and gone into employment before returning to college, studying a number of courses in different colleges before enrolling in an access to higher education course at Newbattle Abbey College. Another returned to education once their children had left home.

Both were complimentary about the support they received both at college and university. This was contrasted with some previous experiences at larger colleges.

When they entered 2nd year of university, the students described how they were similarly equipped to deal with the academic demands of the course as those who had attended the first year in university. Indeed because they had been working towards an award (HNC), they had more experience of assessment.

Meeting with SFC

The Members met with a number of members of staff from the SFC:

Dr John Kemp (Interim Chief Executive)
Martin Fairbairn (Chief Operating Officer)
Lorna McDonald (Director of Finance)
Ken Rutherford (Assistant Director & OA Manager)
Michael Cross (Director, Access Skills & OA Agreements)

The main themes discussed were:

- Outcome agreements, how they are developed and what they mean in terms of the relationship between the SFC and institutions.
- Regulatory and assurance role of the SFC in both college and university sectors.
• Depreciation and technical deficits – the SFC indicated they would provide a short paper to the Committee.
• The number of student places available in higher education for Scottish/EU students.
• Widening access.