I am responding, on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council, to the Scottish Parliament Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee’s call for written evidence on the general principles of the above Bill, to assist the Committee’s scrutiny of the Bill. In addition to views on the general principles of the Bill I note the Committee is interested in our views on:

- how helpful the policy memorandum and financial memorandum are; and
- the consultation the Scottish Government carried out prior to the introduction of the Bill.

General Principles

The Council’s view, expressed in our response to the consultation on the abolition of the Graduate Endowment (GE), was that the evidence from the Scottish Government presents a clear case for abolishing it. The main reason is that the Graduate Endowment appears to have turned out to be inefficient as a stand-alone measure, in that the risk of it being perceived negatively as a barrier to access to higher education is not justified by the amount of revenue it raises.

Financial Memorandum

In the Council’s response to the consultation we urged that there should be no reduction to the lifelong learning budget as a consequence of abolition. We were concerned that the loss of income should not be passed onto poorer students as a reduction in student support budgets or to HEIs as a reduction in their current or future funding levels.

Accordingly, we welcome the clarification on this given in paragraphs 24 and 25 of the financial memorandum. We are reassured by these paragraphs which state that abolishing the GE will not impact on budget baselines for student bursaries or institutional funding. However we do note that abolition will limit the Scottish Government’s ability to respond to non-budgeted financial pressures when they arise.

Policy Memorandum

We found the policy memorandum helpful in setting out the Scottish Government’s rationale for abolishing the GE. We agree that financial hardship and the perception of debt may be a barrier to some potential students, but we are not aware of any clear evidence that the GE itself has been a barrier to access.

Consultation prior to introduction of the Bill

The Council welcomed the opportunity to respond to the consultation which appeared to be carried out in an open and transparent manner.

In our response to the consultation we highlighted that this move will increase the difference between the support arrangements for full-time and part-time students. We understand this was raised by others in response to the consultation and believe that this is being addressed in the Scottish Government’s current review of Funding for Learners.