

Board of Management

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 17 June 2026
Paper No.	BoM4-G
Agenda Item	3.2
Subject of Paper	Chairs Year End Report
FOISA Status	Disclosable
Primary Contact	Chris Deery, Chair of the Board
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Action	For Discussion

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. To discuss the Chair's quarterly report to the Board of Management.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. To provide the Board of Management with an update on the Chair's activities since the last meeting, and to offer a broader reflection on the Chair's first year in the role.

3. Consultation

- 3.1. In progressing the matters outlined in the Chair's report, colleagues across the College and across the sector have been engaged.

4. Key Insights

- 4.1. The Chair is responsible for the leadership of the Board of Management as the College's governing body. The Chair works in partnership with the Board and the Principal to set the strategic direction of the College, monitor performance and ensure high-quality learning and outcomes are delivered for students. The Chair also has an ambassadorial role for the Board within the College, and for the College with external stakeholders.

5. Impact and Implications

- 5.1. The Chair's report ensures that Board members remain informed of the Chair's recent activities and other key developments and activities of interest to members.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Chair's Report

Chair's Report to the Board of Management: June 2026

1. A Year of Perspective

This is my fourth report as Chair and, as the academic year draws to a close, it feels like the right moment to step back and reflect on my first year in the role: the progress made, the challenges faced and, most importantly, what I want to build on.

The clearest thing I can say is this: my admiration and confidence in this institution has grown. The College has continued to strengthen, and my understanding of its strengths has deepened. When I started, I knew the headline facts. What I have gained since is the substance behind them: the quality and passion of the people, the depth of expertise, and the genuine ambition that runs through this organisation.

The transition to Regional College status was an important milestone for the institution. It provides a clearer platform for leadership and accountability and reflects the scale and significance of the role the College now plays within Glasgow and beyond. It also creates an opportunity for us to play a stronger role in shaping conversations about skills, economic growth and the future of the sector.

Graduation at the Royal Concert Hall was one of those moments that stays with you. Watching students come forward, seeing the reactions of their families, hearing the pride in lecturers' voices: it was a direct reminder of what all the work is ultimately for. You can read the statistics, but nothing replaces being in the room when someone's talent and hard work turns into a qualification and a future.

Judging the HND Jewellery design competition was another highlight of the year. Students were asked to design a lapel pin for the Board, working through the full professional process from brief to prototype. The quality of the work and the confidence with which they presented their ideas was impressive. It was another reminder of the professional standards being developed every day across the College.

Flora and Samantha have helped bring the realities of student life into our discussions in a way that papers and reports cannot always capture. Their contribution throughout the year has been significant. What has struck me most is the scale of the pressures many students manage alongside their studies, from financial hardship to mental health challenges and the cost of simply getting to campus. The Student Pantry, which recorded 214 interactions in a single semester, exists because these pressures are real and growing. They are not peripheral issues. They are part of the lived experience of many of the people we serve and should sit behind every decision we make.

The operating environment has also been more demanding than many anticipated. The financial constraints across the college sector remain severe, and the flexibility colleges have to build long-term sustainability is still far too limited. Colleges are being asked to connect employer needs, skills priorities, government expectations, widening access and economic growth, in a system that often makes that connection harder rather than easier. Figuring out how to be genuinely effective in that environment is one of the real strategic challenges facing this College and this Board.

The more time I spend in the sector, the more convinced I become that colleges are some of

Scotland's most important but least understood institutions. They are engines of opportunity, social mobility and economic growth that too rarely receive the recognition they deserve.

What I feel genuinely confident about is the quality of the people around us: Board members, the Executive team, and staff throughout the organisation. That is the College's greatest strength, and the foundation everything else is built on.

2. Governance Beyond Process

If this year has reinforced one thing for me, it is that good governance lives in behaviours, not documents.

Processes, structures and reporting all matter. They provide the framework within which organisations operate. But the organisations with the strongest governance are rarely distinguished by the quality of their processes alone. They are distinguished by culture, relationships, openness to challenge and the willingness to have honest conversations when issues are difficult.

The Gillies Report reinforced this for me. Its real lesson is not that Boards need more structures or more reporting. It is whether the right conversations are taking place: are the right questions being asked, are boundaries being respected and are decisions being made in the best interests of the institution?

By that standard, I believe our governance is strong.

What has encouraged me most this year is the quality of discussion taking place across our Board and Committees. In Finance Committee, discussions have become increasingly focused on the assumptions that sit behind the numbers, the long-term sustainability of the College and the choices we need to make as an institution. Challenge has been welcomed, and the quality of analysis and reporting has continued to improve as a result.

The same can be seen in the Development Committee, where discussions have increasingly moved beyond individual projects towards a more connected view of how major initiatives, estates decisions and income opportunities support the College's longer-term ambitions. While these are simply two examples, I have seen similar progress across the wider Committee structure during the year.

More broadly, I have seen stronger partnerships develop between Conveners and Executive leads, creating an environment where challenge is welcomed, different perspectives are valued and better decisions emerge. That is exactly how good governance should work.

The relationship between Chair and Principal has also been central to the year. Through our weekly meetings, Paul and I have built an open and direct working relationship based on trust, honesty and mutual respect. We challenge each other's thinking, maintain a clear distinction between governance and management, and remain focused on what is best for the College. I want to recognise Paul's leadership during the year. His passion for the College, his ambition for its future and his belief in the importance of the college sector are qualities I admire and strongly support.

This has not been an entirely straightforward year from a governance perspective. There have been occasions when we have needed to work hard to ensure our focus remained on the

effectiveness of the Board and the interests of the institution as a whole. Those experiences have reinforced another important lesson: the quality of a Board is not measured by the strength of individual contributions, but by its ability to work collectively in pursuit of a shared purpose.

As we move into the next phase of the College's development, that sense of collective responsibility will become increasingly important.

3. A Board Finding Its Next Gear

My one-to-one conversations with Board members have confirmed something I had sensed from early in the year: there is real commitment here, and a genuine desire to contribute more meaningfully to the College's strategic direction. People care deeply about this institution. What has also been clear is the depth of experience and the breadth of connections Board members hold across the city, the sector and beyond. That is an asset we should use more deliberately in the year ahead.

As I reflect on the year, I believe the next step in the Board's development is not about doing more. It is about being more deliberate in how we use our time and where we add value. At present, considerable Board time is occupied by assurance items that have already been examined in detail through Committees. That scrutiny is important, but when it is working well it should create more space at Board level for the conversations only the Board can have: our long-term direction, the opportunities and risks facing the College, and the choices that will shape our future.

The Board will add most value when it raises the quality and altitude of its discussions, bringing its collective experience, judgement and external perspective to bear on the issues that matter most. That means strengthening the connection between strategy, Committee agendas and Board discussions, ensuring our time is focused on understanding the story, risks and choices behind the papers rather than simply processing them. Committee discussions, performance reporting and Board papers should all make it easier to see how the decisions we are making contribute to the direction we have set for the College. Continuing to move from paper-led discussions towards theme-led discussions will be an important part of that journey.

As part of that, we will review Committee membership over the coming weeks to ensure we are making the best possible use of the skills, experience and perspectives available across the Board. The objective is not change for its own sake, but to ensure our governance structures continue to support the College's priorities and ambitions.

Looking ahead, I want to create more opportunities for strategic deep dives at Board level: disciplined discussions on major issues that give us the space to engage with choices, not simply receive information about them. I also want to draw more deliberately on the expertise and connections that Board members bring through their work across the city, industry, the public sector and beyond.

Alongside that, I intend to bring in external voices from employers, Glasgow City Region, sector leaders and specialists in areas such as future skills and workforce development. The Board should be regularly connected to the world the College is preparing students to enter.

4. A Sector at a Turning Point

The more time I spend engaging with Chairs, Principals, the Scottish Funding Council, Ministers and colleagues across the sector, the more I feel that the college sector is entering an important period of reflection and potential change.

For much of the last decade, the conversation has understandably been dominated by funding. That remains important. However, my sense is that the discussion is gradually moving beyond funding alone and towards a bigger question: what role should colleges play in Scotland's future economy and society?

The Future Positive programme, the development of a new college framework, Scottish Funding Council reform, regional collaboration and the wider transformation agenda are often discussed as separate initiatives. My sense is that they are all grappling with the same underlying questions. What role should colleges play in Scotland's future economy? How do we respond to changing employer needs? How do we remain relevant to learners and communities? And how do we ensure the sector remains sustainable in the long term?

Whether all of that ultimately leads to significant reform remains to be seen. Public sector reform is often discussed more easily than it is delivered. What I have become increasingly convinced about, however, is that City of Glasgow College can't and won't wait for others to define its future. Whatever shape national change takes, we need to be clear about the role we want to play and the contribution we want to make.

That is why I believe we should approach the future with confidence.

This year has provided several reminders of what this institution is capable of achieving. The announcement of the Defence Technical Excellence College, with City of Glasgow College as the hub institution for the West of Scotland, is the result of sustained effort, strong partnerships and a clear sense of purpose. Our selection for the Queen Elizabeth Prize research exchange, as the only college chosen alongside leading universities from across the UK, is another example. These are not simply achievements to celebrate. They are evidence of the capability, credibility and ambition that exists within this College.

The same applies to the conversations taking place through the Glasgow Colleges Leadership Group. One of the most encouraging aspects of those recent discussions has been a willingness to look beyond individual institutions and focus on what is best for learners, employers and the city as a whole. The emerging curriculum alignment work is a good example. At its heart is a simple question: how do we make provision across Glasgow more coherent, more responsive and more closely connected to the needs of the regional economy? Those are exactly the kinds of conversations the sector should be having, and City of Glasgow College should continue to play a leading role in them.

None of this removes the importance of the financial challenges we continue to face. City of Glasgow College remains the lowest price-per-credit funded institution in the sector, despite its scale, complexity and significant contribution to higher-level learning. That reality continues to shape many of the choices we make and reinforces the importance of securing a fair and sustainable funding model.

Funding will remain one of the most important factors in determining what the College can achieve over the next decade. Whether that funding comes through public investment,

commercial activity, partnerships or new income streams, our ability to deliver on our ambitions will depend on our ability to generate and invest resources wisely. The challenge for the Board is therefore not simply to secure funding, but to ensure that every pound supports clear, long-term outcomes for learners, employers, communities and the wider economy.

The transition to Regional College status gives us an even stronger platform from which to do that. It brings greater responsibility, but also greater opportunity. As the sector continues to evolve, City of Glasgow College is well placed not simply to respond to change, but to help shape it.

5. Shaping the Future

Strategy 2040 will be one of the most important pieces of work we engage with in the year ahead. Its value won't be measured by the number of ambitions it contains, but by the clarity it creates. The choices it forces. The tangible priorities it identifies. And the kind of institution it clearly positions City of Glasgow College to be as we answer questions like - What should we become over the next decade, and how do we remain relevant, differentiated and financially sustainable in a changing tertiary system?

The world our students are entering is changing rapidly. Artificial intelligence, digital transformation, net zero, demographic change and evolving patterns of work and learning are already reshaping the skills employers need and the opportunities available to learners. The Board's role in the coming months is not to predict every change, but to ensure the College is clear about where it wants to play, where it can add most value and where it should focus its effort and investment.

The Polytechnic discussion we are about to have is an important part of that wider conversation. Having read the pre-read, my own view is that it deserves serious consideration by the Board. City of Glasgow College already operates as a polytechnic in practice: applied, technical and professionally focused, with learning closely connected to industry and real-world outcomes. The question is not simply whether we adopt the title, but what it says about our identity, how we differentiate ourselves within Scotland's tertiary system and the future direction of the College. This is a strategic discussion and one that deserves thoughtful debate. Alongside these longer-term questions, we must remain focused on the outcomes we are delivering today. Our full-time FE attainment rate stands at 63%, still some way behind the highest-performing college in the sector and below the sector average. Our full-time HE outcomes continue to improve but also remain below the sector average. These figures matter. Behind every percentage point are individual students whose future opportunities are shaped by the support, learning and experience we provide. Closing that gap should remain a priority for the College and an area of continued and clearer focus for the Board and its Committees.

Taken together, all of this leaves me with five areas I believe the Board should focus on over the coming year:

1. Shape a Strategy 2040 that makes clear choices and provides clarity about the College's future role, priorities and identity.
2. Strengthen long-term sustainability by maintaining financial discipline while continuing to grow and diversify income.
3. Continue evolving the Board's contribution, creating more space for strategic discussion, external insight and forward-looking challenge.

4. Use our Regional College status and sector influence to help shape conversations about skills, economic growth and the future of tertiary education.
5. Improve outcomes for students, particularly where attainment and progression remain below the standards we aspire to achieve.

What gives me confidence is that the College enters this next phase from a position of strength: strong leadership, an engaged Board, committed staff and a growing sense of the role we can play within the city, the sector and beyond.

Ultimately, everything we discuss as a Board, whether strategy, finance, governance, risk or reform, matters only because of its impact on the people who come through our doors. Our responsibility is to ensure that future generations of learners leave this institution with more opportunities than they had when they arrived. That is the standard against which we should measure everything we do.

My first year as Chair has strengthened my belief in this College, in its people and in the role it can play within Glasgow, Scotland and beyond. I am more optimistic about the future than I was when I started, and I came into the role with high expectations. The challenge now is to bring the clarity, ambition and collective purpose that will help turn the College's considerable strengths into even greater impact for students, employers, communities and the city whose name we proudly carry.