Board of Management

Date of Meeting	**23 September 2026**
Paper No.	**BoM1-J**
Agenda Item	**4.1**
Subject of Paper	**Chair's Report: September 2026**
FOISA Status	**Disclosable**
Primary Contact	**Chris Deery, Chair of the Board**
Date of production	**14 September 2026**
Action	**For Discussion**

1. Recommendations

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

2. Purpose

2.1. To update the Board of Management on the Chair's activities since the last meeting of the Board.

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 ensures 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.

Appendix 1: Chair's Report (September 2026)

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

1. Looking Ahead

At our June meeting, I reflected on my first year as Chair and suggested that, while the College was starting from a position of strength, we should not wait for others to define our future. With Strategy 2040 ahead of us, we have an opportunity to be clear about the College we want to become and the role we want to play within Glasgow and the wider Scottish economy. Three months on, that feels even more relevant.

Through the various sector and regional discussions, I have been involved in over recent months, I have seen considerable activity across Government, the Scottish Funding Council, Colleges Scotland and the sector itself around the future direction of colleges and the contribution we are expected to make to Scotland's wider ambitions. Much of this is still developing, but I think the direction is becoming clearer. The debate is moving beyond whether the college sector needs to change towards some much more interesting questions about what we want it to become, what outcomes we expect it to deliver and what will be required to make that possible.

For City, I see that as an opportunity. The Principal and Executive team are already actively engaged in many of these developments, and the Board has an important role in supporting and challenging that work. Together, we should understand the changes taking place around us, contribute to them where we can, and use Strategy 2040 to make deliberate choices about our own future rather than react to decisions made elsewhere.

2. From Policy to Delivery

The Scottish Government's Programme for Government has featured prominently in several of the sector discussions I have been involved in over recent weeks. These conversations have been useful in considering both where colleges fit within the Government's priorities and how we make that contribution more visible. Skills, employability, economic growth and tackling poverty feature prominently, alongside a continuing emphasis on public service reform. For colleges, there are specific commitments around apprenticeships, work-based pathways, regional skills activity and £22 million of investment through RISE, the Training Access Fund and the Flexible Workforce Development Fund. There is also specific reference to engineering and maritime skills within Glasgow City Region.

One of the issues that has come through in these discussions is that announcing funding and accessing it are two different things. The landscape can be complex, and it is important that we understand where priorities are being shaped, who we need to engage with and how we position City early enough to influence opportunities rather than simply respond to them. This is also an area where I think the Board can add value. There is considerable experience and connectivity around our Board table which we should be prepared to use in support of the Principal and Executive team.

I think there is a positive message for the sector in this. Many of the outcomes Government is trying to achieve improving economic participation, supporting people into sustainable employment, addressing skills shortages and creating opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds - are areas where colleges already make a significant contribution.

One of the things I have taken from these discussions is that the challenge now is to translate that alignment into delivery. That is particularly important in the context of public service reform. The pressure on Scotland's public finances means that simply arguing that colleges are important will not be enough. Increasingly, we will need to demonstrate the outcomes we deliver, where collaboration can create greater value and where different approaches might achieve better results.

For me, that is a healthy challenge. It is also relevant to our own work on Strategy 2040. We should be asking not only what provision we want to offer, but where City can make the greatest difference to learners, employers, Glasgow and the wider economy over the next decade and beyond.

3. Reform and Sustainability

That leads naturally to the work now under way on the College Sector of the Future. The Principal and I have been pleased to contribute directly to this work, and I recently participated in a strategic foresight exercise looking towards 2040, alongside representatives from colleges, Government, the SFC and other sector partners. That exercise identified financial sustainability, lifelong learning and skills, economic transition and increasingly complex learner needs among the major forces likely to shape the sector. One of its strongest conclusions was that the pressures facing colleges are increasingly structural rather than temporary and that the response is therefore likely to require more than incremental change.

I will also be participating in the next stage of this work, which is beginning to tackle some of the harder questions: the future role and priorities of colleges; regional and collaborative models; governance; funding; and how the sector should be structured and delivered. Those are exactly the questions I think need to be asked. The evidence also provides an important reminder of the breadth of what colleges currently do. Colleges operate across schools, further and higher education, apprenticeships, workforce development, lifelong learning and community provision, while supporting learners who often face significant barriers to participation.

It also brings home the circumstances in which many of our learners are studying. Across the sector, 61% of FE students reported experiencing financial difficulty, 47% reported skipping meals and 36% reducing their use of heating or electricity. Those figures are a powerful reminder that, as we discuss future structures and funding models, access and the ability of learners to succeed must remain central to the choices we make. The breadth of the college role is a strength, but it also raises choices. In a constrained financial environment, it is unlikely that every institution or the sector collectively can simply continue doing everything in the same way.

I will be discussing the emerging 2027/28 funding position with fellow Chairs and Principals this week. The material prepared for that discussion frames the choices facing the sector in terms of 4 scenarios ranging from managed decline and survivability through to sustainability and growth. What I find most important about that framing is the distinction between funding a system to survive and investing sufficiently to enable it to change.

I do not think financial sustainability and sector reform can be treated as separate conversations. The challenge is to create a financially sustainable sector which is also capable of reforming, and to be clear about the choices and trade-offs required to achieve that.

4. Glasgow and Regional Collaboration

The Principal and I have continued to work closely with the other Glasgow Chairs and Principals through the Glasgow Colleges Leadership Group. We have spent some time clarifying where GCLG can add most value, with a stronger focus on those areas where collaboration between the three colleges can deliver greater benefit for learners, employers and the city than individual institutional action.

One important example is the proposed Skills for Glasgow curriculum alignment work. The intention is to develop a common evidence base across the three colleges and examine provision across eight key sectors, including where there may be gaps, unnecessary duplication, opportunities for greater specialisation or clearer learner pathways, and areas where collaborative delivery could make sense.

I think this is potentially significant. Genuine collaboration becomes more difficult when it moves from sharing good practice to considering where institutions might do things differently. But that is also where much of the potential value lies. Importantly, collaboration does not remove institutional accountability. GCLG can provide strategic leadership and develop opportunities, but material decisions remain with the individual College Boards.

As Chair, I will continue to support an ambitious approach to collaboration where there is a clear benefit to learners and the city. As this work develops, however, we should be prepared for some potentially difficult choices about where City leads, where we collaborate and where greater specialisation may make sense. Those choices must ultimately remain with this Board.

5. Our Own Position

Against that external backdrop, it is important that we remain grounded in how our own College is performing. There is much to be positive about. The latest SFC student satisfaction results are particularly encouraging, with 95.2% satisfaction among full-time FE students and 93.0% among full-time HE students. These are strong results and a credit to colleagues across the College. At a time when we are discussing structures, funding, reform and strategy, it is worth remembering that the learner experience remains at the heart of what we are here to deliver.

At the same time, we should not confuse relative strength with immunity from the pressures facing the wider sector. The draft 2025/26 year-end position is around £0.3m better than we were forecasting at Q3, although around £0.3m worse than the original budget. Looking ahead, the approved 2026/27 budget includes a planned deficit, and longer-term funding sustainability remains a significant strategic risk.

There is a similar challenge around investment. Our recent asset work gives us better visibility of future requirements, but it also reinforces the scale of the task. Around £2.9 million of Estates & Facilities and IT assets are already beyond indicative lifecycle dates, with a further £6 million of lifecycle requirements identified over the following three years, although this does not mean that all require immediate replacement.

None of that should make us defensive. Quite the opposite. Better visibility allows us to make better choices. The combination of strong learner satisfaction, significant commercial and development opportunities, our position within Glasgow, and the work now beginning on Strategy 2040 gives us a good platform. But we will need to remain disciplined about financial sustainability, outcomes, investment priorities and where we believe the College can create the greatest value.

6. Closing Perspective

What strikes me most from the various discussions I have been involved in nationally and regionally is how closely they connect to the questions we are beginning to ask ourselves through Strategy 2040. What should a successful college look like in 2040? Who should we serve? Where should we lead? Where should we collaborate? What capabilities and assets will we need? And, inevitably, what choices will we have to make?

We will not answer those questions at one Board meeting, nor should we. But I think we have an opportunity over the coming year to approach them with confidence and ambition, drawing on the experience around our Board table, the evidence emerging from the sector and the views of our learners, staff, employers and partners. The external environment will undoubtedly continue to change. Our job is to make sure that City is helping to shape that future rather than simply responding to it.