Board of Management

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Agenda Item	**4.3**
Subject of Paper	**Principal's Report: September 2026**
FOISA Status	**Disclosable**
Primary Contact	**Dr Paul Little CBE DL** **Principal & Chief Executive**
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Action	**For Discussion**

1. Recommendations

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

2. Context

2.1 My first report of the new 2026/27 Academic Year is framed around my ongoing efforts to competitively position our College to optimise emergent and future opportunities and mitigate potential strategic challenges. It is structured around the four strategic quadrants of our corporate scorecard.

2.2 This positioning seeks to futureproof our pioneering tertiary institution against the headwinds of an increasingly challenging policy landscape including: public sector reform, a new Programme for Government, growing privatisation, a change of multiple key decision makers (ministerial, Scottish Government officials and Scottish Funding Council executive leadership), impending increased devolved powers, planned rationalisation (initially NHS, local government and civil service) and, more specifically, tertiary sector reform (College Sector of the Future).

3. Consultation

3.1 In progressing the matters outlined in the report, colleagues in the College and across the sector, as well as regional, national, and international partners, have been engaged.

4. Key Insights

4.1 The Principal is responsible for the operational management of the College, as outlined in the Scheme of Delegation, subject to the strategic and policy direction of the Board.

4.2 The Board has the responsibility of setting the strategic direction of the College. The College's Strategic Plan 2021-30, refreshed in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, outlines our commitment to Let Learning Flourish through the inspiration, excellence and innovation of our leading teaching methods and world-class facilities. Our eight strategic priorities, shown below, are mapped across four strategic themes:

- **Students**
  Priorities 1 and 2
- **Growth and Development**
  Priorities 3 and 4
- **People and Processes**
  Priorities 5 and 6
- **Finance**
  Priorities 7 and 8



4.3 Five supporting strategies – Student Academic Experience, People & Culture, Corporate Development, Digital and Sustainability – have been developed to deliver on the Strategic Plan. Progress is measured and tracked through the College's Balanced Scorecard.

4.4 By delivering on our strategic priorities, the College, as an anchor institution, will facilitate opportunities for our students, support industry, enable regional economic growth, build communities and, in so doing, affect positive change in people's lives in and beyond the city whose name we are proud to bear.

5. Impact and Implications

5.1 The Principal's report ensures that Board members remain strategically informed of the work of the College, our ongoing progress in the delivery of the Strategic Plan, and alert to key developments affecting the College and the wider tertiary sector.

Appendix 1: Principal's Report

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

Strategic Positioning

1. The new academic year begins from a position of considerable operational and strategic strength despite these growing headwinds. Early indicators confirm an increased demand for the College, improved learner retention and outcomes, and continued growth across our commercial, international, innovation, and workforce development activity. While there remains significant work to do – particularly in Further Education attainment and sustaining student success – the direction of travel is encouraging and reflects the impact of timely and targeted interventions over the past year.

2. Our planning cycle for AY2026/27 is now complete, with Operational Plans approved by ELT following extensive engagement across all Faculties and Directorates. The planning process has provided a clearer understanding of institutional interdependencies, resource requirements, and SMART priorities for the year ahead. This gives us a strong platform of expertise in operational delivery as we continue the development of our longer-term Strategy 2040 plan and seek to position City of Glasgow College uniquely as Scotland's leading next-generation Polytechnic institution.

3. The College continues to demonstrate sector-leading progression outcomes. The latest published leaver destination data confirms that 97% of our 4,587 surveyed leavers achieved a positive destination – the highest in the sector. Of these, 80% progressed to advanced study and 17% to employment. Significantly, however, 77% of those entering employment progressed into work related to their studies, 10 percentage points above the sector average, whilst an impressive 89% of those continuing within our College progressed to a higher level of study. In addition, 1,471 learners were supported to make UCAS applications during AY2025/26, with 1,098 securing university places (up 30 places compared to last year) for AY2026/27 across 30 universities.

4. Student recruitment remains exceptionally strong. We received 21,558 first-choice applications for full-time courses commencing in August/September 2026, an increase of 2% on the previous year. Full-time Year 1 recruitment is currently at 97% of projection and Year 2 at 105% of projection. Overall figures remain encouraging with first-choice applications up 9%, offers at 116% of target, and enrolments at 104% for Year 1 and 95% Year 2. These figures are particularly encouraging given the increasingly competitive tertiary education market and demonstrates that City of Glasgow College is still very much considered by Scottish school leavers as a popular alternative route to higher education in a post-school marketplace dominated by universities.

5. We exist primarily for our students, so it is pleasing to me that early evidence suggests that learner outcomes have indeed improved substantially across all modes of study. Internal data indicates an overall improvement of some 16 percentage points compared with last year. Full-time FE attainment is expected to be around 69%, representing our strongest performance since the pandemic, while full-time HE successful course completion is expected to return to around 74%, which is above the current sector average. Outcomes for part-time learners have also improved. While these figures remain subject to final confirmation, they provide strong evidence that our sustained focus on retention, attainment and progression is beginning to deliver results. It remains essential, however, that we maintain this momentum to best serve our students.

6. Student success will remain a strategic priority throughout 2026/27. The positive early indicators provide a platform on which to build, but they are not a reason for complacency. We will continue to focus particularly on retention, attainment, and

progression, supported by strengthened quality assurance, curriculum leadership and targeted interventions for learners facing additional barriers to success.

7. The College continues apace to strengthen its distinctive and competitive positioning as Scotland's next-generation Polytechnic. Our growing profile in higher education, professional and technological education, applied research, innovation, industry engagement, and international activity provides a compelling institutional narrative. We will continue to develop (international) Centres of Excellence in priority areas – such as maritime, defence, creative industries, food and drink, logistics, and care – and strengthen regional and national partnerships to ensure that our curriculum responds to learner demand, tackling poverty, mitigating climate change, employer requirements and economic growth.

8. Political and stakeholder engagement remains a fundamental part of this strategic and distinctive positioning. The College has continued to engage over the summer with Scottish Government, UK Government, civic, tertiary sector, business and international stakeholders around our priorities, including sustainable college funding, greater financial flexibility, skills devolution, Defence Technical Excellence College status and the Riverside Innovation Campus. In the summer period we hosted visits from: HRH Duke of Edinburgh, the Royal Navy's Second Sea Lord, and the CEO of Crown Estates. A detailed stakeholder mapping exercise has now identified priority relationships across the political, governmental, civic, sectoral, and business landscape, allowing our advocacy to be more targeted and purposeful.

9. We continue to play a system leadership role with our engagement with Colleges Scotland, and College Employers Scotland. We are represented in the former in national and regional steering groups and in the latter in the Executive steering group. We also regularly engage with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) supporting the development of its new dashboard and data-reporting arrangements. This provides a helpful opportunity to ensure that the characteristics and contribution of large, higher education-intensive colleges such as our own are properly understood within the emerging tertiary system. The College remains committed to making the case for a new funding system which more accurately reflects the scale, complexity and economic contribution of our provision. Indications are this new funding mechanism will begin in 2028. The Chair and I have met recently with the new interim CEO of SFC (Paul Devoy) and have invited him to make an early visit to our super campus.

10. International engagement and partnership building continues to enhance our global profile and generate tangible educational and commercial opportunities. Senior leaders from Glasgow University met with us to progress our partnership working – including the joint delivery of taught Masters – and a joint approach internationally. It was clear they needed our close ties to industry and our well- developed global reach.

11. More than 100 international students are expected to start at Riverside in September, while secured international activity with Centro de Formação Marítima de Angola/Sonangol in Angola is valued at approximately £500,000. The longstanding Zhejiang Technical Institute of Economics (China) partnership continues to expand, activity continues through the British Council International Skills Partnership in Uganda, and further opportunities are developing involving Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office-funded programmes. September will also see significant international business development activity through our participation at the European Association for International Education Conference – the only Scottish college to attend – and planned in-country engagement in India (moderating an AI in hospitality conference), Singapore (dementia care) and China (logistics and extending to Digital

design). We are also finalising scholarships to enable Creative Industries students to exchange visits from our City of New York University (BMCC) partner and vice-versa.

12. Our international growth is increasingly being underpinned by revised governance and compliance arrangements. Enhanced due diligence, approval and annual review processes for international partnerships are being implemented, alongside a risk-based approach to international admissions in response to increasingly stringent UK Visas and Immigration requirements. Current compliance data indicates that the College remains on track to retain its Higher Education Provider with a Track Record of Compliance status. The appointment of a Commercial Growth Director will further strengthen international growth and governance.

13. Our external and system leadership profile continues to flourish through thought leadership, attendance at high-profile events and sector engagement. For example, I attended the First Minister's reception at Edinburgh Castle with top business leaders at the invitation of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce. Meanwhile, the College has generated significant national and international coverage around tertiary education, advanced maritime simulation, and international partnerships. We have also continued to secure senior visits and engagement from government, civic and international representatives, reinforcing our position as an institution with influence beyond the traditional college sector.

14. The acceptance by HRH The Princess Royal to become our inaugural Chancellor will further differentiate our College as an exceptional, pioneering and outstanding institution with a bright future.

Students

15. The start of AY2026/27 has been underpinned by extensive work and maintenance programme over the summer and preparations to ensure that both campuses are clean and ready for the return of students. The College has been maintaining a strong focus on campus readiness, seamlessly letting a new catering contract with Elior, enhancing safer campus access, inclusive support, and strengthened community engagement.

16. Learning from mishaps at Glasgow University, our College has also strengthened the way in which assessment outcomes are communicated to students. In addition, the introduction of Course Assessment Boards (CABs) during 2025/26 has addressed longstanding issues around inconsistent communication of confirmed results and their impact on progression. Some 94% of full-time courses held CAB meetings, with 6,988 students receiving formal results reports by 7 July. CABs are now embedded as a standard feature of the academic quality cycle, providing greater consistency and assurance around student results.

17. We have maximised new SFC funds – Skills and Education (RISE), and Training Access Fund (TAF) – to support our wider student success and widening access priorities. The proposed activity is focused particularly on priority learner groups (i.e. single parents) and on addressing barriers to participation, in support of the Scottish Government's priority to tackle child poverty.

18. The College continues to explore opportunities to add further value to the student experience through procurement and supplier relationships. Our procurement department has secured a paid cyber security internship with strategic IT supplier Proact for a City of Glasgow College student, providing direct industry experience while strengthening the relationship between procurement, curriculum delivery, and

employability. A structured Student Added Value Framework will now be developed to embed similar opportunities more systematically across future strategic procurements.

19. Our College again hosted Glasgow's Merchant Navy Day commemoration at the Riverside Campus, providing a fitting tribute to those from the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleet who lost their lives in conflict, while also recognising the vital contribution made by subsequent generations of seafarers. The presence of our cadets alongside Merchant Navy veterans, families and civic representatives was particularly poignant and reinforced the College's responsibility, as the UK's largest maritime college, to safeguard and honour Scotland's proud maritime heritage.

20. Elsewhere on Riverside, the College is completing the protracted legal negotiations to transition away from St Luke's Halls of Residence contract. Following extensive negotiations with Phoenix Centenary Court Ltd and legal advisers, no students are now residing at St Luke's, with alternative accommodation secured across the city centre. Subject to final written confirmation of the agreed settlement, including the final £100,000 rental payment, the contractual relationship with St Luke's will be formally concluded.

21. Our own onsite Riverside Halls of Residence is currently operating at approximately 80% occupancy, with remaining capacity being managed around Phase 3 arrivals between September and November. Alternative accommodation arrangements have also been established with Homes for Students, including preferential arrangements at Foundry Courtyard, Broadway Studios and City Wharf.

Growth and Development

22. Our Riverside Innovation Campus remains one of the College's most strategically significant estate development opportunities. The Business Case will be presented to the Board during this academic session. A particularly exciting element of the proposal is the potential creation of up to five Extended Reality (XR) immersive simulation suites, capable of delivering sector-neutral digital simulation across a wide range of learning and training applications. With regard to this Innovation Campus, I had a productive visit to Sweden to meet the owner and CEO of Stena Sphere, Dan Olsson, who agreed to make a sizeable donation from his Family Foundation to this development; his CEO & Head of Shipping at Stena Rederi AB, Markus Lindbom, has agreed a follow up visit in early October to progress this development, which could initially include a Stena Centre for SME incubation.

23. Indeed, engagement with industry and public-sector partners has demonstrated strong interest in the proposed immersive simulation model. Discussions have taken place with BILD Studios to explore the technology and its potential applications, while the Royal Navy, British Army, Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and the Scottish Ambulance Service have all expressed strong interest in the proposed facility. An initial investment of approximately £30,000–£50,000 is being considered for a demonstration suite to allow the College to showcase the technology and develop a wider partnership and investment proposition.

24. The Charles Oakley Building Vision and Objectives Report – being developed with Hub West Scotland and Real Estate Works – has progressed to draft stage and is now under senior review ahead of consideration by the Development Committee. The work considers the longer-term strategic potential of the building and surrounding site, including future education provision, commercial opportunities, estate development and its contribution to wider Glasgow City Region ambitions.

25. Sustainability remains an important part of our longer-term asset strategy. The Sustainability Action Plan is progressing with an increased focus on linking lifecycle investment to carbon reduction and identifying external funding opportunities. The latest Environmental Sustainability Audit provided a positive overall assurance rating, with no Priority 1 or Priority 2 actions identified.

26. Our commercial asset management is also being strengthened. The Sale of Assets initiative is ready for launch, providing a governed mechanism for the reuse or sale of surplus College assets. This will support circular economy principles, extend asset life and generate value from assets that are no longer required operationally. Alongside this, a structured lifecycle replacement programme is being developed to provide greater visibility of future asset investment requirements and improve alignment between asset risk, operational priorities and medium- to long-term financial planning.

27. The College's commercial and workforce development pipeline remains strong. A combined Commercial and International income target of £6.6 million has been established for 2026/27, while the £971,740 New Flexible Workforce Development Fund allocation provides significant scope for further employer-led growth. An employer information event is planned for September, and new provision is being developed in response to identified market demand. Our Polytechnic institution is unique in the college sector in being so entrepreneurial and in securing commercial, non-SFC income.

28. Growth continues in our Modern Apprenticeship activity with a strong start to the new academic year. There have already been 245 starts against a target of 202, with approximately £494,000 claimed against a target of £450,800. Overall Modern Apprenticeship success achievement currently stands at an unprecedented 77.5%. Additional Apprenticeship staffing capacity has been introduced, and preparations are underway for the next contracting round, which may provide a three-year funding opportunity.

29. The College has also recently secured its first commercially funded College Local Innovation Centres accelerator with Public Health Scotland putting up to 10–12 colleagues through the programme from September. Further innovation programmes are being delivered with partners across health, social care, early learning, and digital transformation. The College's Scottish Innovation Knowledge Exchange activity has also received national recognition through publication in the UK Government Parliamentary and Scientific Committee's *Science in Parliament* journal.

30. The College has continued to demonstrate significant external profiling and peer recognition for the quality and impact of our work. Across the reporting period, 34 awards and commendations were secured, including 23 winners and a further three second-place results. Moreover, the College was the only UK college selected for the prestigious Queen Elizabeth Research Funding; for a USA Research Exchange and we also secured the UK Association of Colleges' City & Guilds Employer Engagement Award for our contribution to the CLIC innovation project.

People and Processes

31. The implementation of MyCityPeople remains a strategic HR transformation project. Further user acceptance testing involving HR, Payroll, OD and Change Champions has been completed, with Stage Gate 3 signed off and now with phased parallel running underway. The new integrated system is expected to improve automation, reporting, workforce information, and operational efficiency.

32. Significant work continues across organisational development, EDI, and staff development. The successful and popular One City event in June attracted 1,117 bookings across 65 sessions, 33 workshops, 21 Wellbeing Hub activities and 18 Social Village activities, providing an important opportunity for staff engagement and community building.

33. The College continues to invest in staff development and inclusive practice. During the reporting period, 1,533 mandatory modules were completed, 70 staff development requests were received, and work continues to support the 2026 cohort of 120 lecturers through GTCS registration. Inclusive recruitment training is being rolled out to managers, while Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Wellbeing activities includes development of a menopause toolkit, implementation of the Emily Test action plan and further development of Report & Support.

34. The new national grievance procedure for teaching staff has been agreed and will now be implemented at City of Glasgow College. The College is also progressing procurement for a single provider covering Occupational Health, Employee Assistance and Health Surveillance, supporting a more integrated approach to staff wellbeing and occupational health provision.

35. The industrial relations (teaching only) climate remains challenging at our institution. The protracted EIS-FELA Health & Safety dispute concerning seven members of staff within the Welding and Fabrication area has continued into AY2026/27 with repeated notices being received from full-time EIS officials for further industrial action. Additional assurance work is, however, progressing, including the review and redrafting of 32 Risk Assessments and Safe Systems of Work and an independent occupational hygiene review in accordance with the scope agreed with EIS-FELA. A separate dispute notification concerning management style, institutional culture, organisational ethos, and workload allocation was also received in June; initial discussions with EIS full-time officials took place in late August. However, despite our several requests to meet to resolve this second dispute, EIS Full-time officials have only just responded.

36. The Depute Principal and HR Director continue to engage directly with EIS-FELA representatives, whilst regularly keeping the Scottish Funding Council and Scottish Government fully informed of all discussions related to both disputes.

37. Facility time arrangements have also been considered for AY2026/27. Following the EIS request for an increase to 36 hours, the College has agreed to maintain the existing 34 hours, which already represents a high level of facility time compared with other colleges in the sector. It costs our college some £200k each year to release EIS-FELA branch officials from their contracted lecturing duties to represent their members; In fact, last year, the College actually paid for 46 hours per week of facility time from lecturing - 34 hours of local facility time for EIS representatives and an additional 12 hours per week of national facility time from lecturing.

38. The College's wider Health and Safety assurance programme continues apace. Faculty Assurance Audits have identified opportunities to improve the sharing of H&S documentation, equipment inspection and maintenance arrangements and recording of equipment inductions. Improvement work is underway with Faculties, OCS, Estates and OD, with a full assurance report scheduled for SMT, ELT and Board consideration in September. Separately, an anonymous HSE concern regarding a Nautical hydraulic rig was investigated and HSE confirmed in August that the matter was closed with no required action.

39. The College is also strengthening its operational resilience and security arrangements. Preparatory work for Martyn's Law continues, including development of a business case for a zoned PA system and improvements to student identification and campus access. The legislative Bill has received Royal Assent, however, there is a two-year preparation time before the Act comes into force; this is anticipated to be spring 2027. The College has also shared its emerging Martyn's Law practice with Inverness College through the Glasgow Learning Quarter.

40. The summer IT works programme has been successfully completed, including classroom technology refreshes, AV upgrades, teaching-space moves and preparations for the new academic year. The College is also progressing the procurement of new high-capacity fibre connectivity between City and Riverside campuses, which will provide greater network resilience and capacity.

41. The migration away from VMware is progressing through the implementation of Proxmox, providing significant potential long-term savings, and reducing dependency on a commercial platform. A Network Security Audit has also been completed, providing assurance over the College's current cyber posture while identifying further opportunities for improvement.

42. Cyber resilience remains an important institutional priority. Options are being assessed for replacement of the existing Security Information and Event Management following the withdrawal of QRadar, while the recent network audit has recommended consideration of a Security Operations Centre capability.

43. The College is increasingly exploring how AI can improve operational efficiency. Scoping work is underway on the potential application of AI to augment timetabling and wider administrative processes, while the Associate Director of Procurement and Asset Management's participation in the Scottish Government Digital & AI Forum provides an opportunity to bring emerging public-sector practice and learning back into the College.

Finance

44. The College continues to manage against strong financial and funding headwinds all the time maintaining strong focus on sustainability, income generation and tight expenditure control. The latest outturn Q4 forecast for the year to 31 July 2026 projected a deficit of £493,000, an improvement of £300,000 on the previous forecast in Q3. Annual Financial Statements are being prepared ahead of the external audit commencing on 5 October.

45. The College remains on track to deliver 100% of its SFC credit allocation for 2025/26, while recruitment and operational planning for 2026/27 provide a positive platform for continued full delivery. Other Colleges, like Kelvin, which have not been able to use all their credit allocation have instead used part of it for restructuring and ultimately downsizing. Our 2026/27 SFC allocation is 157,800 credits, equating to 213 courses, 384 full-time cohorts and approximately 8,630 students before additional degree provision is included. These numbers will subsequently increase as our degree provision begins. No other College has our breadth of degree provision.

46. Income diversification remains pivotal to our financial strategy. Modern Apprenticeship activity is ahead of profile. Approximately £500,000 of international Deck and Engineering activity has been secured with CFMA/Sonangol, and the £971,740 new FWDF allocation provides a significant opportunity to grow workforce development income. The College continues to pursue commercial, international and innovation opportunities to mitigate pressure on core public funding. We are pushing hard to secure our status through a public announcement as a Defence Technical Excellence College

(DTEC) to thereby secure a share of either £10M or £20M of skills funding. This will open up further Defence funding opportunities with our strategic skills support for Clyde Transformation and for our training of the Royal Navy and the Norwegian Navy.

47. The College is continuing to identify opportunities to improve commercial returns from its estate and services. Work is also progressing on extending the Premises Licence beyond Scholars Restaurant to support wider commercial events and activities.

48. Our financial planning continues to recognise the consequences of reduced accommodation capacity following the exit from St Luke's. While alternative accommodation has been secured for affected students, the reduction in College-managed capacity will ultimately impact accommodation income and our ability to support some commercial and group activity. Longer-term accommodation options are therefore being reviewed in the context of projected cadet, international and wider business demand.

49. The College continues to pursue value for money through stronger strategic procurement and capital planning. Procurement is supporting delivery of the £1.6 million 2026/27 capital programme across 20 projects, while lifecycle investment planning is being developed to provide a more strategic approach to future asset replacement and expenditure.

Forward Look

50. The immediate priority is to consolidate on our strong start to AY2026/27. This means maintaining recruitment momentum, maximising student retention, delivering 100% of our SFC credit allocation, sustaining the improvement in learner outcomes and ensuring that students receive an excellent, inclusive, and safe experience across both campuses.

51. Strategically, we will continue to progress our Strategy 2040 plan, strengthen our Polytechnic positioning and develop our Centres of Excellence, while maintaining our political and stakeholder advocacy around sustainable funding and greater financial flexibility. We will also continue to build the case for the Riverside Innovation Centre as a nationally significant asset for skills, innovation, immersive learning, and economic development.

52. Growth activity will remain focused on converting the strong pipeline of New FWDF, Modern Apprenticeship, commercial, international and innovation opportunities into sustainable income and strategic partnerships. September priorities include EAIE, the Uganda delegation and business development activity in India, Singapore and China, alongside further work with Faculties to identify priority programmes for 2027/28 international recruitment.

53. Diary date - winter Graduation on Monday, 23 November (3 ceremonies).