

Board of Management

Date of Meeting	25 March 2026
Paper No.	BoM3-E
Agenda Item	3.3
Subject of Paper	Principal's Report: March 2026
FOISA Status	Disclosable
Primary Contact	Dr Paul Little CBE DL Principal & Chief Executive
Date of production	18 March 2026
Action	For Discussion

1. Recommendations

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

2. Consultation

- 2.1. 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.

3. Key Insights

- 3.1. 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.
- 3.2. 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



3.3. 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.

3.4. By delivering on our strategic priorities, the College will facilitate opportunities for our students, support industry, 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.

4. Impact and Implications

4.1. The Principal’s report ensures that Board members remain informed of the work of the College, delivery of the Strategic Plan and key developments affecting the College and sector.

1. Appendix 1: Principal’s Report

Principal's Report to the Board of Management: March 2025

Strategic Planning

1. City of Glasgow College is a resilient institution with deep strategic, operational, tactical and crisis planning expertise as evidenced by the successful planning of a four-way College merger, navigating a financial crisis, the creation of Scotland's first super campus, a global pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis and a funding & financial crisis.
2. Since 2009 some five plans have been prepared including the strategic plan for merger, the super campus masterplan and various strategic plans. I am now preparing the groundwork with ELT and SMT for the 2040 strategic plan to build on the Board's initial strategic discussions last November.
3. Mindful that we are in organisational renewal since coming out strongly from the pandemic with under half of the ELT new to post, and about the same in SMT, I have carried out three strategic planning workshops so far to secure a shared understanding and shared language of strategic planning. I also want to secure ownership of the subsequent delivery of this planning process.
4. I am encouraging ELT and SMT to ask themselves better questions such as "who we uniquely are and who we need to be" and are we "reverting and rebuilding or resetting and redesigning". We are beginning our review of what we have achieved during the life of the last strategic plan (2021-30) whilst also starting our strategic surveillance to establish strategic known knowns, unknown knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns. At the Board meeting, I am also happy to give a short presentation with an indicative roadmap.

Strategic Positioning

5. City of Glasgow College – as the largest college in Scotland – intentionally positions itself as a System leader in the college sector and increasing in Scotland's emerging Tertiary sector, as an influential shaping and convening flagship institution and as a centre of excellence (technological & professional education and higher skills). We have been a civic anchor institution for many years and following the publication of the Cumberford-Little report (2020), we have publicly promoted that regional positioning further. In fact, our legacy institutions pre-merger were all specialist central colleges (i.e. Higher Education Colleges) and never FE Community Colleges, as the majority of smaller Colleges in both Glasgow and Scotland are. City of Glasgow College delivers 56% of all SFC credits in Higher Education, which is more than double the volume of any other college and accounts for 22% of total HE provision across the sector. Furthermore, 57% of our students who progress from us to university do so with Advanced Standing.
6. Unlike any other College in Scotland, our curriculum is dominated by higher education and, again, unlike any other College, we enjoy an extensive global reputation. We are highly regarded as entrepreneurial, resilient and strategic – "we lead from the future not to the future". Coming strongly out of the pandemic into a more volatile, uncertain, complex and uncertain operating environment, we have sought greater financial security by consistently lobbying for the flexibilities

to borrow and hold a surplus. Both are necessary if we are to realise the competitive advantage of progressing our Riverside Innovation Campus. Recently, the Convenor of the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee used his last question before the pre-election period to ask the Scottish Government about this very issue, building on the political support I had secured from five out of six parties at Colleges Scotland's hustings.

7. Held back by an out-of-date Scottish Funding Council funding formula – we are currently the lowest price-per-credit funded college – we have strategically sought to differentiate ourselves as Scotland's Super College with Scotland's Polytechnic. For our first 15 years we positioned ourselves as Scotland's Super College, however, this has had less impact over time, especially in lucrative international markets. We have, in addition, reopened discussions with the Qualifications Awarding Agency to secure our own (degree and post-graduate) award-bearing powers. We already have an agreement in principle to deliver two out of three modules of Strathclyde University's Teachers Qualification for Further Education (TQFE). No other Scottish College can offer this. In addition, we are exploring the joint delivery at City of Glasgow College of System leadership and Innovation taught master's programmes.
8. As Principal & CEO, I undertake weekly strategic network engagement with civic leaders, government, funders, employers, as well as with sectoral, regional, national, international agencies, and politicians. Our most recent visit was from the Scottish Government Minister for Business and Employment, who wrote afterwards to say: *"It is evident that the College's success is underpinned by a highly committed and forward-thinking leadership team"*. Members may be interested to learn that this Minister, Richard Lochhead MSP, is one of our distinguished alumni. I have targeted my efforts to influential politicians including cabinet secretaries, ministers, party leaders, and education spokespeople, as well as special advisers in the run-up to May's Holyrood. This work has been closely aligned with Colleges Scotland's advocacy efforts and has helped influence the Scottish Government's announcement in March to commit to a new college framework, in parallel with the university framework, aimed at securing the long-term sustainability of Scotland's college sector. FE & HE Minister Ben Macpherson MSP said the initiative will bring together the government, Colleges Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council to design reforms that support the sector's future success and meet Scotland's skills needs. The first phase will review existing reports – including the Cumberford-Little Report – and evidence before developing recommendations for ministers, while also identifying early adopter projects to test new approaches to collaboration and regional delivery.
9. Another highly successful annual Burns Supper was held in our Scholars' Training Restaurant – the 16th since the merger with our legacy colleges. The evening brought together an exceptional group of civic, political, industry, and international partners, including the Lord Provost of Glasgow, Principal of Edinburgh University, members of our Board, College Fellows, parliamentarians, senior defence and skills leaders, and representatives of the international consular corps – notably our Japanese partners, reflecting the College's growing global footprint.
10. The UK Government has announced in March additional funding for Scotland through what it describes as a Defence Growth Deal worth £50 million. Recently, I was invited to attend, along with only one other college, the joint announcement from the Ministry of Defence and the Scotland

Office of a £10 million skills package towards the creation of two Defence Technical Excellence Colleges (DTECs), one in the West and one in the East of Scotland. We have worked hard with the UK Government, Royal Navy, Colleges Scotland, and the Scottish Government to strategically position our College as the hub DTEC for the West of Scotland. Members should note that this complements our positioning as the largest of four UK National Maritime Centres of Excellence regulated by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency.

11. As a Thought Leader in tertiary and technological education, the College successfully hosted its annual Learning and Teaching Conference in January, attended by leaders from some 30 colleges, universities, and schools. Our guest speaker, award-winning writer Darren McGarvey, helped generate extensive social media coverage of the event.
12. Our applied research and innovation credentials were nationally recognised in February, when two colleagues in the Nautical & STEM Faculty took part in the first stage of the Queen Elizabeth Prizes USA Research Exchange at the US Embassy in London and then at a gala awards dinner in Mansion House in London. This builds on our Queen Elizabeth award-winning research into oxygen depletion. We were the only UK College out of eight higher education institutions to be nationally selected for this international research exchange. Again, FE colleges don't really have the specialist staffing expertise to engage in such research, but we do as Scotland's Polytechnic. This positions us uniquely in our growing engagement with and funding from the UK defence sector. Meanwhile, our College Local Innovation Centres (CLIC) programme has been recognised with UK-peer recognition from the Association of Colleges' Beacon Award for College Engagement with Employers.

Students

13. I am pleased to report that 2026/27 applications continue to show a healthy projected growth with first-choice applications currently increased by 10% on last year, with a 5% increase on offers made. We operate in a fiercely competitive post-school market and are in direct competition with universities for school leavers who are seeking to study higher education.
14. On Saturday, 14 March, the College welcomed over 1,200 prospective students to our first Offer Holders' Day, giving excited applicants the chance to experience our award-winning twin-site super campus and to discover for themselves what life at City is really like. Held across both our City Campus and Riverside Campus, this event helped offer holders experience the next step on their learning journey with confidence by exploring our outstanding learning environments, meeting lecturing staff and future classmates, and taking part in course-specific talks, workshops, and practical activities. This followed another successful Open Day held in January when over 1,000 prospective students visited both campuses.
15. Members will be interested to learn that the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students has increased by 2.8% from 2024/25. However, post-pandemic many more students are presenting with increased support needs and there has been an 5% increase from 2025/25 in students requiring Personal Learning Support Plans to 2,531 overall.

16. The College remains strongly committed to widening access to higher and further education some 34% of our students come from the top 20% most deprived areas across Glasgow and, given our tertiary reputation, also from across Scotland. Members will have heard me previously report this. There are 142 nationalities in the City Student population (this number fluctuates), and 25% of students have a nationality outwith the UK. Interestingly, for the first time, there are a greater number of students from Africa than from the rest of the UK.
17. Deans and Faculties have focused on reducing the number of early withdrawals of full-time students; an extra 77 FT students have been retained – FT FE withdrawal is down to 4.6% from 5.9% last year while FT HE withdrawal is down to 2% from 3% last year.
18. More staff are dedicating more time to listen to students through our Stop, Check, Support process, whereby staff engagement has increased from 43% to 61% for Semester 1 this year (and continues to increase). We are receiving fewer student complaints this academic year; to date, we have received 47 complaints while for the same period in AY24/25, 49 complaints were received.
19. There remains a strong demand for student accommodation with Riverside operating at 97% occupancy and St Luke's at 96%, supporting international and maritime student activity. The Depute, VPCDI and CFO have been extensively involved in discussions with the owner of St Luke's to negotiate the terms of release for a planned exit of the premises in July 2026. These discussions are largely focused on finances and ensuring minimal disruption. St Luke's Accommodation exit has now been confirmed for Thursday, 30 July 2026. Initial communications have been issued to our students who reside in St Luke's and to the nautical companies. At present, 40 cadets are expected to transfer from St Luke's to Riverside Accommodation.
20. We continue to expand inspirational learning opportunities for our students beyond their core curriculum. HN students from Legal Services had the opportunity to be part of an inter-college mooted competition presided over by Lady Rita Rae CBE, former Supreme Court Judge and Senator of the College of Justice. BA Hons Photography Alumina Deljeem Ray won the Portrait of Britain Award using work produced in the 24/25 Degree Show. One of our exceptional culinary students excelled on the international stage at the American Scottish Foundation Burns Supper in the prestigious University Club in New York, where he was presented with the Young Wallace Chef Award. Whilst another Culinary student returned from India with a second place globally after representing Scotland at the prestigious Young Chef Olympiad 2026.

Growth & Development

21. Our HR and Project Management teams are now finalising the implementation plan of the new integrated HR system. This will be a much more automated system (including staff overtime claims), freeing staff time and providing more real-time reporting. This project remains on track for a July go-live with payroll parallel runs continuing until October. Staff communications, training plans, and Change Champion engagement are also underway.
22. International engagement continues to generate new partnership and recruitment opportunities across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia whilst our commercial training portfolio continues to

expand, including IOSH provision for CalMac, Trauma-Informed Practice, and Apprenticeship Employer of Excellence programmes.

23. Our Innovation activity – through CLIC – has grown significantly, supporting over 140 businesses and more than 200 participants in AY25-26, with further pipeline development underway.
24. The Riverside Innovation Centre & Riverside Accommodation Business Case has been discussed and given outline approval from both ELT and the Development Committee. Approval at this stage allows the Business Case to progress to the next stage where wider consultation with key stakeholders is planned. Further updates will be provided to both the DC and Board of Management through 2026.

People & Processes

25. The College is creating a Data Governance Group which will provide guidance on how the College embeds legislation for the Data Use & Access Act 2025 (DUAA) which was passed through Parliament in June 2025. The DUAA amends, but does not replace, the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (PECR). Broadly, this will impact on what data the college holds, the reasons for holding and the retention period. All relevant staff areas are represented on the group.
26. At the LNC, the ‘resetting of relationship’ with EIS-FELA continues but with stuttering progress. Recently, we have had to report unacceptable behaviour of local branch officials to EIS full-time officers. Currently, we are mitigating the disruption from local strike action at our Riverside campus. The ongoing dispute was reported at the People and Culture Committee on Wednesday, 18 February, where the Committee acknowledged the strong and transparent response from the College, the swift delivery of the action plan, and the assurances provided that broader health and safety audits and processes remain appropriate.
27. Following the ‘Notice of Industrial Action’ letter sent from EIS-FELA by email on Thursday, 12 February, the College has sought clarification on three separate occasions about what matters were considered as outstanding. At the LNC meeting on Wednesday, 11 March, the Depute Principal again asked for clarification on which matters EIS-FELA believed to be outstanding. On Thursday, 12 March, the Depute Principal received a communication from the full-time official highlighting six additional points of dispute. To assist EIS-FELA, these additional points were added to the original 17-point dispute, however:
 - Only one from 17 aspects of Dispute – notified on Wednesday, 3 December 2025 – now appeared on the list of matters unresolved.
 - Three aspects from the 17 in dispute were updated and expanded upon by EIS-FELA.
 - Two aspects from the list provided on 12/03/26 were entirely new.
28. The Depute Principal wrote to the full-time official on Tuesday, 17 of March stating that the College considered all matters closed in line with the advice from the HSE and that the College was fully compliant.

Strike action is planned to take place on the following dates:

- Friday, 20 March 2026
- Monday, 23, Tuesday, 24, & Wednesday, 25 March 2026
- Monday, 30 Tuesday, 31 March,
- Wednesday, 1 & Thursday, 2 April 2026

29. The Depute Principal has written to EIS stating that it is for them to move this forward and that avoiding planned industrial action clearly rests with the EIS-FELA. The College has offered to meet to conclude matters but has yet to receive a formal response.
30. More constructive discussions are ongoing with Unison around the recruitment of a branch representative for our College and the Board.
31. The College achieved a successful UKVI Basic Compliance Assessment outcome, remaining within sponsor thresholds for visa refusal, enrolment, and course completion. Preparatory work is underway to respond to forthcoming UKVI compliance changes, including revised BCA thresholds and implementation of the Agent Quality Framework.
32. The 2024/25 Annual Procurement Report was published on 18 December 2025 and submitted to Scottish Ministers, highlighting the College's procurement performance and contribution to sustainability, community wealth building, and responsible procurement.

Finance

33. Q2 Forecast had been presented to Finance Committee showing an increased Deficit of £1.2m.
34. The Capex Budget of £1.9m, for the period of 26/27, will be tabled at Finance Committee in March. £1m is already committed for the Network and Simulator Projects, allowing the college £0.9m to append on key capital projects. At the time of writing the College is awaiting the outcome of the SFC Funding Allocation for 2026/27, therefore the Capital Budget may change as a result.
35. Over the coming weeks and months, the College will be undertaking the Budget Process for 2026/27, with a view to final approval being sought at the June Board Meeting.
36. Global Memory prices in IT are rising sharply due to increased global demand, particularly driven by moves by manufacturers for AI-related components. This is already driving up the cost of PCs and laptops, including through the Scottish HP Framework, who are in the process of issuing a 30day notice to the Scottish Government for their price increase.
37. The College remains on track to deliver 100% of credit allocation in 2025-26.
38. The College has received £600k in Year Redistribution of student Support Funds (100% of amount requested).

Forward Look

39. Our Summer Graduation in the historic 12th Century Glasgow Cathedral is set for Thursday, 18 June 2026.
40. Following the huge success of our One City staff event last year, this year's One City event is scheduled for Tuesday, 23 June 2026.
41. Ambitions: Glasgow City Region priorities and institutional renewal strengthening.