

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minute

30 January 2026 at 9.30am

RCS, Boardroom



PRESENT

Jo Buckley (JB)	Sharon Mair (SM)
Andrew Butcher (AB)	Umut Mert (UT) (SUP)
Ruth Calder (RC)	Prof Matthew Rooke (MR)
Tabitha Dearie (TD) (SUVP)	Caroline Roxburgh (CR)
Prof Lois Fitch (LF) (Dep Principal)	Prof Jeffrey Sharkey (PJS) (Principal)
Elizabeth Jenkinson (EJ)	John Taylor (JT)
Robert Laidlow (RL)	
Alexander Lee (AL)	
Jamie Mackay (JM)	

IN ATTENDANCE

Lydia Demaison (LD)	(Director of Human Resources)
Prof Vicky Gunn (VG)	(Board Secretary)
Janette Harkess (JH)	(Director of External Relations)
Deborah Keogh (DK)	(Head of Engagement)
Mark Logan (ML) for Item 6	(Entrepreneur in Residence) for item 6)
Prof Aaron Shorr (AS)	(Director of Music)
Alan Smith (AS) (DFE)	(Director of Finance and Estates)
Helen McVey (DBD)	(Director of Business Development)
Stephen Broad (DRE)	(Director of Research and Engagement)

IN THE CHAIR

Prof Dorothy Miell (DM) (Chair)

1.	<p>Welcome, Introductions, Apologies for absence and</p> <p>The Chair welcomed all attendees in person (and via Teams) and opened the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies were recorded from Stuart Cross, William English, Andrew Outram, Nacim Pak-Shiraz, Morag Campbell</p> <p>The Chair expressed the Board's sorrow at the death of John Wallace and recorded appreciation for the letter received from the SFC Board, which conveyed condolences to the RCS community and reflected warmly on his contribution as a valued member of the SFC Board.</p>
2.	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>No new declarations of interest were submitted.</p>
3.	<p>Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Governors held on 31 October 2025</p> <p>The minutes of the previous meeting were APPROVED as an accurate record.</p>
4.	<p>Actions Log and Matters Arising not elsewhere on the agenda</p> <p>The Board reviewed the rolling action plan and noted.</p>
4.1	<p>The Chair requested that the existing action on business development be refined to reflect the original minute, specifying that a discussion at the Strategic Away Day should focus on commercial opportunities and business development, rather than on all income strands across all Directorates.</p>

	<p>ACTION: Secretary to amend the Action Log to reflect focus on Business Development and commercial opportunities. Chair to discuss further details for the Business Development and Commercial Opportunities' discussion session at the Strategic Away Day with the DBD, DFE, and, where relevant, DP.</p>
5.	<p>Chair's Update The Chair highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Conservatoire's AGM had taken place successfully on Thursday 15 January 2026. • The appointment of Bruce Pritchard (Chair of Heriot-Watt University) as the new Chair of the Committee of Scottish Chairs • The Tertiary Education Bill had passed and concerns regarding ONS reclassification of HEIs had been avoided
A	<p>MAIN ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND APPROVAL</p>
6.	<p>Discussion Topic: Supercluster proposals and ideas The Chair welcomed Mark Logan, RCS Entrepreneur-in-Residence, to present on Supercluster proposals and ideas and lead the discussion thereafter. The Head of Engagement introduced Mark, noting his role in planting the seeds of a supercluster within the development of a creative economy strategy and highlighting the positive activity associated with the Split Screen Project (Split Screen.)</p> <p>The Committee considered the emerging concept of a Creative and Performance (C&P) Supercluster centred within Glasgow's existing one-square-mile concentration of creative and performance activity. It was noted that this cluster is currently undervalued and its collective potential underexploited at city, Scottish, and UK levels. Key dimensions highlighted included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative and entrepreneurial growth – opportunities to align the strong growth trajectory of Glasgow's tech sector with creative and performing arts, including support for graduate founders and the wider economic impact of creative entrepreneurship. • Regeneration – the need for coordinated engagement in the Garnethill/Sauchiehall Street area, where City Council and Glasgow Life are exploring restoration and renewal. • Ecosystem development – strengthening interactions between creative and tech organisations to position creative technology as a strategic focus for the city. A working title of <i>Creative & Performance Supercluster</i> was noted, with reference to Scottish Enterprise's interest in condensed superclusters for targeted UK funding. <p>Plans are being explored to establish creative studio space on Sauchiehall Street by end of 2026. Active discussions with the University of Strathclyde include opportunities to expand creative-tech presence during Fusion Fest and to build flexible, mutually supportive partnerships.</p> <p>For RCS, members discussed activities to enhance visibility and influence, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amplifying the emerging Graduate Offer • Promoting the breadth and impact of RCS activity • Strengthening narratives that connect artistic output with the city's innovation landscape.

	<p>The need to diversify funding sources and engage with creative-strategy funds was emphasised, noting that initiatives such as <i>Split Screen</i> have demonstrated the value of ecosystem-based support.</p> <p>Brand perception was identified as a priority area, with a call to articulate more clearly RCS’s theory-practice integration and entrepreneurial mindset. Members agreed that being an active voice within the supercluster would support this repositioning. It was further noted that <i>Split Screen</i> had effectively challenged traditional perceptions of RCS, and that proactive engagement with economic policy officials—including hosting visits—would help communicate the institution’s wider contribution.</p> <p>ACTION: CSMT to consider ways of effecting the amplification and strengthening of messages as discussed, and extending engagement with economic policy officials to report back on progress to the Board as relevant.</p>
<p>7.</p> <p>7.1</p> <p>7.2</p> <p>7.3</p> <p>7.4</p>	<p>Report from CSMT The Board received and discussed the CSMT summary report. The following was highlighted:</p> <p>TQER and Regulatory Assurance The Committee received an update confirming that TQER activity continues to be managed effectively by the Deputy Principal, with confidence in achieving full compliance, whilst recognising the challenges of the new process which has been designed to include FE as well as HE. Members noted the increasing emphasis on regulatory assurance and the implications this has for institutional systems and Board oversight and noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened focus on systems, processes and translation into practice. • Upcoming external scrutiny include both an audit of TNE activity and an SFC student assessment audit following an SFC raised concerns scheme outcome at the University of Glasgow <p>Recruitment, Scholarships and Funding Context International recruitment remained a central institutional priority, with particular attention to maintaining competitive scholarship provision in a challenging landscape.</p> <p>The Committee noted that the Scottish Government is reviewing sector funding, and sector intelligence highlighted a marked decline in Chinese applicants. The Principal emphasized the need for continued focus on global markets and competitive positioning and the importance of sustaining scholarship generosity relative to peer conservatoires.</p> <p>Universities Scotland Principals Group Update The Principal noted that he provided performing arts sector-specific context to this group on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relationship between cultural strategy and higher education for RCS • The forthcoming Economic Impact Study demonstrating national value • The Conservatoire’s essential role in the talent pipeline for national performing companies • The need to rebalance narratives away from cultural-funding-for-consumption toward recognition of economic contribution. <p>Curriculum Mix and Strategic Academic Planning The Committee discussed potential links between recruitment trends and curriculum balance. The Deputy Principal confirmed that upcoming programme reviews will explore:</p>

7.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recalibration of provision and alternative cohort models. Potential resizing of programmes (e.g., PG Music). Growth opportunities in Dance and Stage & Screen. Feasibility of a post-Erasmus postgraduate scholarship. <p>Strategic Positioning and Horizon Scanning</p> <p>Two interconnected strands of strategic work were identified to ensure RCS is positioned effectively within the wider cultural, economic and educational landscape:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short-term horizon scanning to ensure RCS is positioned effectively within cultural, economic and educational ecosystems, with data required for lobbying ahead of the preelection period beginning 16 March. Long-term contextual rethinking of institutional positioning and future direction. <p>ACTION: CSMT to prepare a session at the Strategic Away Day (23 April 2026) to discuss short term horizon scanning and longer-term strategic thinking in terms of institutional positioning and future direction including reference to investment priorities as considered in the discussion of the Management Accounts below in 9.1 bullet points 8 & 9.</p>
8.	<p>Report from the Students' Union</p> <p>The Board received and noted the report from the President and Vice President of the Students' Union highlighting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The visit by the DP, the DBD, and the institution's critical friend for TQER to the SU Council to discuss the importance of the quality process The continued positive partnership with the Glasgow School of Art, highlighted by the successful joint Burns' Night Ceilidh.
9. 9.1	<p>Finance and Strategic Plan</p> <p>Management Accounts to End October 2025</p> <p>The Board received and discussed the management accounts to end October 2025. It was noted that the previous year's approved budget had anticipated a breakeven position with a small loss; however, the unexpected shortfall in student recruitment—primarily international and postgraduate taught Music—had required immediate use of the contingency fund and an additional contingency allocation for the current year.</p> <p>Under CSMT leadership, in-year expenditure mitigations had been implemented, resulting in a projected loss of approximately £200k, which was considered within an acceptable tolerance and reflective of effective management. The cash position remained strong, and no short-term concerns were identified.</p> <p>Board members acknowledged the institution's strong performance in a challenging environment, while emphasising the need to balance financial decisions with institutional values and to recognise the limits of what may be sustainable. Members noted the importance of preparing for the possibility that external conditions may not improve.</p> <p>Key points raised included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The DFE remained cautious about the wider context, with growth projections viewed as optimistic given ongoing recruitment challenges. RCS had made genuine in-year savings As also noted at F&GP on 16 January 2026, questions of risk appetite were emerging, with the recalibrated plan viewed as ambitious. Board members

9.2	<p>AGREED on the need and welcomed the action from F&GP to begin developing alternative scenarios with clear mitigation levers.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Maintaining an international environment of excellence, supported by 5. maintaining a mix of domestic and overseas students, remained a priority. 6. Work continued to build relationships with new sector peers. 7. Diversification of income required further clarity, including attention to lead indicators and early-warning metrics, which were not yet sufficiently developed. 8. Members suggested that the forthcoming Strategy Day should provide space for open discussion on investment priorities and long-term planning.
9.3	<p>Five-Year Forward Forecast</p> <p>The Board received and noted the first iteration of the five-year forward forecast, which incorporated the projected outturn for the current year and retained the original student intake assumptions. The forecast included optimism around 2028–29 recruitment and recognised additional pension costs anticipated in 2027–28. Members questioned whether some assumptions were overly bold. CSMT had been asked by F&GP to develop alternative scenarios to test the robustness of underlying assumptions. It was noted that the current figures did not yet reflect potential international initiatives or the implications of flat SFC funding.</p>
9.4	<p>Finance and General Purposes Committee</p> <p>The Board received and noted the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on 16 January 2026. Key points included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pensions: A Working Group had been established, supported by external consultancy advice, to revisit pensions arrangements and feed back into discussion at F&GP. • Lease Arrangements: The Committee supported seeking renewal of the existing lease arrangement. Only a small number of pianos were donated; the majority remained under lease. • Investment Policy: The portfolio continued to accrue against benchmarks. Questions had been raised by the student body regarding the nature of certain investments and possible exclusions. F&GP would review the Investment Policy at its March meeting, considering the overall policy framework, the values underpinning investment decisions, and the appropriate universe of permissible investments.
9.5	<p>Financial sustainability KPIs quarterly</p> <p>The Board received and discussed a paper representing a comparison of the original strategic plan measures forecast for 2025-26 with budget and expected outturn for 2025-26.</p>
	<p>Final version KPI annual review for AY2024-25</p> <p>Members received and noted the annual review of KPIs (2024-25) document which now included Research and Engagement information that had been missing in the version presented to the October meeting. The DRE asked the Board to note that reporting for Research and Engagement in the annual review for October each year would be for current numbers not the final ones reported due to an out of step reporting deadline externally.</p> <p>ACTIONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary and the Director of Finance to prepare the full annual KPI review, including the latest data for Research and Engagement and the final data for all other KPIs, for consideration at the October Board meeting. This will be a standing item alongside the Annual Report and Financial Statement.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The DoF to provide a further update in January, presenting the final reported KPIs for Research and Engagement with evaluation of achievements and challenges as demonstrated by the KPIs for the Board's scrutiny.
10.	Student Recruitment
10.1	<p>Re-forecasted student recruitment number targets for AY2026-27</p> <p>The Board received and noted a paper outlining the current student recruitment position, revised forecasts for student numbers, and the resulting implications for the medium-term financial outlook. The paper also identified key recruitment risks and provided an overview of priority markets for each School, together with their respective approaches to recruitment and conversion.</p> <p>In discussion, the Board noted that applications in Music had increased, although this had not yet translated into improved conversion. Members highlighted the need to review scholarship competitiveness and noted the early potential of the Joy International offer in attracting targeted, high quality applicants.</p> <p>The Board considered opportunities to reconfigure resources within the audition process, particularly in Stage and Screen, and observed that recruitment numbers continued to be aligned with previously established targets.</p> <p>Members reflected on the wider strategic issues arising, emphasising the importance of setting realistic recruitment targets in the current external environment, recognising the financial sustainability implications, and acknowledging the need to address potentially difficult considerations as part of future scenario planning.</p> <p>The Deputy Principal underscored the importance of strengthening the marketing and recruitment narrative, particularly through clearer articulation of the entrepreneurial proposition alongside programme outcomes to enhance RCS's competitive positioning.</p>
11.	Approval requests:
11.1	<p>Memorandum of Agreement for Student Exchange with Consimilano</p> <p>The Board considered and APPROVED the Memorandum of Agreement following a straightforward discussion. DP asked Board to note that RCS is applying to re-enter Erasmus Plus (exchanges scheme).</p>
11.2	<p>Memorandum of Agreement with Singapore Raffles Music College</p> <p>The Memorandum of Agreement, Business Case and costings provided were received and considered by the Board.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board APPROVED the Memorandum of Agreement, in principle, with exit strategy to be circulated by email following the meeting for final approval. <p>ACTION: DBD to provide the Secretary, as a matter of urgency, with an exit strategy for the Raffles MOA for approval via email from the Board.</p>
B	ITEMS TO REPORTS AND NOTE
B1	Annual Reports 2024-25
12	There were none submitted to this meeting.
B2	Committee Focus:
13	Report from the Academic Board

	<p>The Board received and noted the unconfirmed minute of the Academic Board meeting held on 14 January 2026. The Principal, Deputy Principal and the Academic Board Elected Member provided an overview of the key areas of business considered by Academic Board.</p> <p>They highlighted the flow of business from the academic governance committees reporting into Academic Board, including the Research Committees, LTQC (and LTAG), and the Strategic Recruitment Committee.</p> <p>The DP noted the need to revisit the composition of Academic Board to support broader strategic discussion rather than repetition of business already scrutinised within the underpinning committees. Board invited the Principal and DP to consider changes to the AB composition and propose any such change to the Board for approval (via NGC).</p> <p>It was further noted that Academic Board continued to make a meaningful contribution to business development while also exercising increased scrutiny of day-to-day academic activity.</p> <p>The value of external membership on Academic Board, including the Lay Board member, was affirmed.</p>
B3	Other Committee Items and Reports
14.	<p>Report from the Infrastructure Committee The minute of the meeting held on 16 January 2026 was received and noted.</p>
15.	<p>Report from the People and Culture Committee The minute of the meeting held on 10 December 2025 was received and noted by the Board.</p>
16.	<p>Governance Updates The Board received and considered the paper provided which set out actions in response to the recommendations from the Advance HE's Governance Effectiveness Review and noted progress made.</p>
17.	<p>Any other business</p>
17.1	<p>Dates for Board Governance Cycle 2026-27 The Board received the initial schedule of Board and Committee meeting dates for AY2025-26. It was noted that the final version of this document would come for approval to the Nominations and Governance Committee on 2 February 2026, after which Outlook appointments would be sent out.</p> <p>Chair asked the Board to note that a Governor Recruitment process was proceeding and was about to shortlist. The foci of this recruitment round were both immediate needs but also succession planning.</p>
C	PAPERS FOR INFORMATION
	There were no papers circulated for information.
D	DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS/ GRADUATION
	Dates of future meetings/events:

ACADEMIC YEAR 2025-26:

Board:

23 April 2026 (Strategy Planning Day)

24 April 2026

26 June 2026

Graduations:

Thursday 2 July 2026

Thursday 29 October 2026

ACADEMIC YEAR 2026-27

Board:

30 Oct 2026

29 Jan 2027

22 April 2027 (Strategy Planning Day)

23 April 2027

25 June 2027

Graduations:

Thursday 1 July 2027 TBC

Thursday 28 October 2027 TBC