

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 14TH SEPTEMBER 2021

11am, Tuesday 14th September 2021

Via Zoom

Present: Rotha Johnston (Chairwoman), Richard Hanna, Michael Fanning, Susan Picken, Peter Weil, Tom Gray, Carmel Mullan, Mark Huffam, Fionnuala Deane, Greg Maguire, Brenda Romero

In attendance: Richard Williams (CEO), Andrew Reid (Head of Production), Anne Dorbie (Chief Operating Officer), Áine Walsh (Head of ILBF), Bernard McCloskey (Head of Education), Mary McVey (Marketing Manager), Linda McGuinness (Financial Controller), Marie Shivers (PA to CEO)

Apologies: Róise Ní Bhaoill

No conflicts of interest were noted.

1.0 Minutes of the Board meetings of 8th June 2021

1.1 The Board minutes were agreed and signed. Actions were reviewed.

2.0 Chairwoman's business

2.1 The Chairwoman recorded our sincere sympathies to the partner and family of our colleague and Board member, Sheila Fleming, who died suddenly after a short illness in June. In honour of Sheila a Charity Golf event was organised at which Northern Ireland Screen fielded a team.

2.2 Ministerial re-shuffles have resulted in a delay to the recruitment process for the new Chair. Whilst disappointing, it is hoped the process is concluded as soon as possible to ensure a smooth transition between Chairs and as we enter the new 22-26 Strategy.

2.3 Carmel Mullan very kindly agreed to Chair the Audit and Risk Committee and Peter Weil was appointed as Chair to the Investment Committee following Elaine Sperber's departure. Board approval was confirmed for both these appointments.

2.4 A new template for Committee Terms of Reference will be circulated for all Committees to agree at their next meeting. These will then go to the Board for approval at the December meeting.

2.5 Internal audit highlighted the need to develop a Matters Reserved for the Board, Scheme of Delegation. It was agreed that this would be developed and brought to the next meeting for Board approval.

2.6 The Chair thanked members for completing their annual assessments. The remaining assessments will be circulated within the next week. The Chair also asked for any outstanding Board questionnaires to be completed by the end of September.

3.0 CEO's Report including Performance Indicator Report and Investment Report

3.1 The CEO noted 3 main points. The first being that the production sector continues to grow from strength to strength despite the challenges of Covid. Yesterday's Investment Committee

focussed on TV Drama and it was clear from the range of projects supported that the incremental strengthening and the amount of local talent within those projects is growing.

- 3.2 The second point being the long process around the economic appraisal/evaluation has come to a positive conclusion. The Department recommended our proposed strategy as the appropriate level of funding. Ministerial approval and available funding are now the only outstanding hurdles to cross.
- 3.3 The final point is the considerable backroom activity being undertaken relating to HR. This is down to an expanded employee count, primarily due to the number of trainee schemes we are currently running.
- 3.4 The CEO noted significant continual funding risks due to the nature of being a public funded organisation. He flagged ILBF and USBF funding as a current concern due to lack of clarity of DCMS and NIO's intention to sustain the increased funding that came out of New Deal New Approach. Hopefully the Comprehensive Spending Review will produce results.
- 3.5 The successful process through Casework has highlighted that the Northern Ireland Screen Strategy aligns well with the Department's 10X Strategy with the Digital ICT and Creative Industries cluster key within this.

KPI Report

- 3.6 The only indicator not sitting on green is large-scale which is predominantly due to timing of awards. Complex negotiations on studio demand are underway and we don't envisage any difficulty in reaching the target.

Investment Report

- 3.7 The CEO noted there is nothing additional to add to the Investment Report. It is useful for the Board to see the number of projects we are managing a relationship with at any given time.

4.0 Finance, Audit and Governance

Risk Register

- 4.1 Covid remains a live issue and continues to be challenging, financially and procedurally, but at the same time it is being managed. The vast majority of Covid management is done by the productions and as society opens up the risks of Covid for the screen industry will increase.
- 4.2 Implications of Brexit remain the same. Currently our direct negative impacts of Brexit are relatively modest and manageable, but wider society issues such as supply chain, cost inflation etc are concerns to our sector as well as to others and will play through in different ways.
- 4.3 Susan Picken noted concerns regarding Festival reopening. QFT are running at 30% capacity which is not sustainable. The Chair reported this issue was of concern to the Culture Arts and Heritage Task Force set up earlier this year, noting the vulnerability of organisations across the sector. Running at a loss once furlough finishes at the end of this month will put further strain on organisations with already depleted reserves. The Chair has brought this matter to the Minister's attention.

- 4.4 In response to comments from Mark Huffam and Fionnuala Deane regarding problems with the issuing of visas, the Chair noted that this was raised as an issue by the task force. Andrew Reid noted that this is an issue that cannot be fixed quickly as there are few people with enough expertise and knowledge of the process.
- 4.5 Carmel noted that the Risk Register is reflective of the current uncertainty and all internal controls and processes have been put in place to manage this. The Board approved the Risk Register.

Audit and Risk Committee Update

- 4.6 Carmel informed the Board that the Gifts and Hospitality Policy and DfE's Mid-Year Assurance Statement were discussed in detail at the last meeting and were presented to the Board for approval. The Board thanked the team and approved these documents.

Management Accounts to 31st July 2021

- 4.7 Following discussion the Board approved the Management Accounts on the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee.

Strategic Resources Committee Update

- 4.8 The Committee met recently and were updated on the 2022-2026 casework evaluation process at DfE.
- 4.9 Working practices were also discussed in detail but as Covid numbers remain high it was noted that a return to office working is not being pushed. It was reported that there is a fairly steady drift back to the office, which has had positive benefits.
- 4.10 A discussion of the pipeline of projects coming forward was also discussed.

5.0 Other Committee Updates

Screen Education and Careers Working Group - including Education Evaluation Presentation by Annabel Jackson

- 5.1 Bernard updated on the education work noting that the CLC's remote classes had been very well received, particularly the ScreenWorks programme. They will be looking to use blended and face to face approaches over the coming months as schools return to a more normal routine. The cycle of exams for next summer should be in place as per normal.
- 5.2 The CEO introduced Annabel Jackson who presented the Education Evaluation Report, a piece of work as part of a wider process to seek to re energise the DfC in terms of the education activity that we support and equally importantly to explore whether there is a better way of measuring and capturing that value.
- 5.3 Annabel summarised the report confirming that this was now close to being finalised. The absolute core of the programme is the thinking behind it, the skills of the partners and the quality of delivery. This report shows that the impacts of the programme are far beyond our own objectives, the nature of the programme is a flagship for Northern Ireland and is a visible success story.

- 5.4 It is very difficult to contest that the programme has strong financial impacts, without the programme significant economic benefit in Northern Ireland would be removed. It is completely seamlessly integrated into the vision of Northern Ireland Screen and is also at the foundation level and at the core of some fairly big projects.
- 5.5 On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked Annabel for these powerful, high-level findings. The Board noted it is content for its onward transmission and negotiation with DfC.

CEFFWG

- 5.6 Susan Picken updated the Board on the Working Group's recent meeting. Belfast Film Festival have just completed Doc Fest, with the Film Festival confirmed for November. Cinemagic and Into Film have just launched their programmes. As already covered, there is continuing concern around cinema occupancy levels.
- 5.7 Announcement of the Destination Hub/Belfast Film Centre is now planned for mid-October/early November. Hope to factor in the release of 'Belfast' at the same time. Susan flagged up that employability and skills are seen as a key part of the Film Centre, however there are concerns regarding ensuring its alignment with what Northern Ireland Screen are providing.

Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund (USBF)

- 5.8 Richard Hanna noted the very significant budget uplift this year of 100% which presented opportunities as well as challenges. The Committee are very encouraged with the breadth of content that is emerging from a number of recent calls from a range of demographics.
- 5.9 The Board watched the new USBF showreel, which tells a very positive story in terms of the work of the Fund. The Board thanked Mary for producing the showreel and the USBF Committee for its continued positive contribution.

Irish Language Broadcast Fund (ILBF)

- 5.10 Ten ILBF projects have received nominations for the Oireachtas Awards, including the project on Aodán MacPoilin, our former Board colleague, with the awards ceremony taking place on Halloween night. An ILBF funded documentary on Tory Island won Spirit of the Festival, the highest award at the Celtic Media Festival.
- 5.11 The Evaluation is ongoing and a draft is expected to go to the September ILBF Committee and then to the December Board meeting for approval. The Evaluation team need to meet with the Chair and CEO in the next few days.
- 5.12 Various training schemes are running well with 6 new trainees starting last week. A clip from Doineann was shown to the Board. The Board recorded its thanks to the ILBF Committee.

Investment Committee

- 5.13 Peter Weil noted that 5 projects were greenlit at the recent Investment Committee, all TV drama projects. He summarised the projects and thanked the team acknowledging the amount of work that goes into the Investment Committee, especially to Nicola Lyons for presenting the projects to the Committee.

Heritage and Archive

- 5.14 Peter noted his disappointment at being unsuccessful in securing UTV archive footage for a heritage project and thanked Bernard and the team for trying to make it happen. He noted good news from Warren Bell at BBC Rewind and looks forward to exploring ways of working together.
- 5.15 As some of the archive content watched can be quite disturbing, a best practice document is being considered in consultation with Ofcom, the BBC and other similar bodies. This also needs to be considered as part of our own policy and safeguarding actions and will be discussed further at the next Archive Working Group meeting.

Skills/Training

- 5.16 Andrew Reid updated the Board on Aim High. The next scheme will recruit in late autumn, assessment centres will take place in early 2022, Bootcamp in March 2022 and then placements from April 2022. The focus for this scheme is very much on diversity and inclusion and Mary McVey has been working with a PR company to get the right message out on our social network channels.
- 5.17 Andrew noted the work of the new talent team. Ursula Devine who runs the New Talent Focus feature scheme and Christine Morrow who is the New and Emerging Talent Executive are responsible for the Northern Ireland producing and directing talent. Without these new talent and short film schemes, we wouldn't have the likes of Michael Lennox, Chris Baugh or Chris Martin who all started out making short films. The Chair followed up by noting the importance of recognising the strength of the team at NI Screen and the way people work together and recorded her thanks to all staff.
- 5.18 Andrew updated the Board on the Pixel Mill. There are currently a diverse range of new and experienced companies resident at the Pixel Mill and Rory Clifford is giving them as much help and mentoring as they need.

6.0 Strategy Development Updates

Economic Appraisal

- 6.1 The CEO was pleased that the Economic Appraisal was successful in its purpose to get through Casework and to deliver the Board's preferred option which is a 27% uplift on our current funding.

SMIL

- 6.2 The CEO outlined disappointment in the lack of momentum within the approval process. While it is still in a good place, it is not really any further on than in May and continues to be a problem with City Deal timing which has yet to be agreed.
- 6.3 Tom Gray informed the CEO of a contact with extensive experience of installing technology similar to SMIL. The CEO agreed to contact him before we go back to the Department.

7.0 Marketing Calendar

- 7.1 The Chairwoman thanked Mary McVey for the updated marketing calendar.


8.0 Any Other Business

- 8.1 The Chair informed the Board that she will reconnect with the NIO Permanent Secretary to make the case for confirmed ILBF and USBF additional funding.
- 8.2 The Chair hopes to be able to hold the December Board meeting in person if the Covid situation allows it. The necessary arrangements will be made nearer the time if this looks possible.

9.0 Date of Next Meeting

- 9.1 The date of the next meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday 14th December 2021 at 11am** with the venue to be confirmed.

Point	Detail	Actioned by	Update
2.4	Compile and circulate new ToR template to all Committees for agreement and Board approval at the next meeting	Anne Dorbie	Completed
2.6	Complete Board questionnaire by end of September	Board members	Nearly complete
4.4	Discuss with Minister concerns around cinema capacity	Chairwoman	Completed
4.5	Lack of local support for companies re Brexit visa issues should be flagged to DfC	CEO	Completed
5.10	ILBF Evaluation document to be finalised, agreed by the Cte in September and brought to the December Board meeting for approval	Áine Walsh	Completed
5.14	Discuss policy and safeguarding actions at next Archive Working Group meeting	Peter Weil	Deferred
6.3	Contact Department to formally request SMIL letter of comfort	CEO	Completed
6.4	Pass details to CEO for contact on SMIL technology for CEO	Tom Gray	Completed
8.1	Reconnect with NIO Permanent Secretary on ILBF and USBF funding	Chairwoman	Completed

Signed: 

 (Chair)

Date: 14th December 2021