

**MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 16<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2021****11am, Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021****Via Zoom**

**Present:** Rotha Johnston (Chairwoman), Elaine Sperber, Richard Hanna, Sheila Fleming, Róise Ní Bhaoill, Michael Fanning, Susan Picken, Greg Maguire, Brenda Romero, Fionnuala Deane, Peter Weil, Tom Gray

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

**Apologies:** Mark Huffam, Carmel Mullan

No conflicts of interest were noted.

**1.0 Minutes of the Board meetings of 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021**

- 1.1 The Board were content with the accuracy of the minutes of the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 meeting. Anne Dorbie confirmed that a cover note for the KPI Report will be written for the next meeting. All other actions were completed, and the minutes were agreed and signed.
- 1.2 The Board were content with the accuracy of the minutes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021 meeting. Work on more information for Option 9 is continuing and the business case will be submitted once the Mid-Term Evaluation outcome has been received. All other actions were completed, and the minutes were agreed and signed.

**2.0 Chairwoman's business**

- 2.1 The Chairwoman noted that confirmation of meeting Minister Dodds was expected soon and that we would offer a set visit to Titanic or Belfast Harbour studios. The advertisement for the Chair will issue on 16<sup>th</sup> April. The Chairwoman thanked Tom Gray for agreeing to join the Audit and Risk Committee. The next Board questionnaire will issue in April/May. The Chairwoman noted that Michael Kuhn was awarded a CBE in the New Year Honours for his contribution to the screen sector. There was also a fitting tribute to Aodán MacPóilin with Rian nag Cos, a documentary on Aodán's life, airing on 2<sup>nd</sup> January. The Chairwoman and CEO had also attended a meeting with the BBC's Director General to discuss the Partnership Agreement.

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

- 3.1 The CEO picked up on some of the updates from his February report to the Board, noting that Bloodlands had been recommissioned for a second series, and that cast announcements for The School for Good and Evil and Dungeons and Dragons had been very high profile.

- 3.2 The Department is to sign off on the mid-term evaluation imminently. Timeframes are challenging, especially SMIL which is tied into the Greater Belfast City Deal and complicated due to the number of stakeholders involved. The time demanded from us as sponsor body is proving challenging but we don't see any reason why we can't get to business case to the Department towards the end of April or early May, which still gives us the opportunity to secure a four year commitment from the Department before the end of June.
- 3.3 The Chairwoman suggested we more publicly celebrate the very high volume of production activity despite the challenge of Covid.

#### **4.0 Finance, Audit and Governance**

##### Risk Register

- 4.1 Anne Dorbie summarised the Risk Register noting that all risks remain the same: Coronavirus risks continue in terms of the closure of the office and travel restrictions; and the continued inability to deliver on our exhibition and outreach projects. Two new risks have been added: SMIL due to undertaking the casework process; and, Child licensing which is an emerging risk around the inability of local children to work on productions in line with UK regulations.
- 4.2 While the issue of studios has been downgraded, additional film studios remain extremely important to harnessing the potential growth within Large-Scale Production. At the moment, Belfast Harbour Studios is dependent on Loop to make it attractive to the larger incoming productions as an overflow facility to augment its studio space.
- 4.3 Demand for a virtual production facility (volumetric stage) has become so great so fast, accelerated by Covid and lockdown, that delivery of the volumetric stage is now equal if not more important than the general phase 2 studio capacity. Belfast Harbour Commissioners are evaluating options for a volumetric stage as part of phase 2 of the expansion of the Harbour Studios.

##### Audit and Risk Committee Update

- 4.4 Sheila Fleming updated the Board on the recent Committee meeting noting PWC, the new external auditors, presented their annual policy review schedule. The Committee also looked at the Fraud and Reporting Concerns policies which are recommended to the Board for approval. Subject to a couple of minor wording changes the Board agreed the policies.
- 4.5 In response to a question, it was confirmed that as part of our core contracting with third party organisations, we require them to have their own safeguarding policies in place. Our Safeguarding Policy is currently being reviewed by the audit team and will be brought to the June meeting for approval.

##### Management Accounts to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020

- 4.6 Anne Dorbie reported that the full budget for the year had been committed and full cashflow will be released with no significant variances or issues by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. The Audit and Risk Committee looked at the Management Accounts in detail at the last meeting and recommended the Board approve. The Accounts were approved.

## Strategic Resources Committee Update

- 4.7 The Chairwoman updated the Board on the recent Strategic Resources Committee meeting which looked at current working from home arrangements and a potential return to office working date. The Committee had an update on HR and recent new members of staff as well as the review of restructuring and regrading exercise. The Chairwoman will update the Board as appropriate with any issues that may arise.

## **5.0 Other Committee Updates**

### ILBF including the ILBF Strategy 2022-2026

- 5.1 Róise Ní Bhaoill noted the recent additional funding round had awarded £180,000 in slate development funding to 14 productions. A number of ILBF programmes are currently airing and training is on track with 6 new entrants finishing their training: two employed in the sector, two continuing their training and two seeking employment. The new cohort of six trainees have completed their production training on zoom with the second part of the training delayed in the hope that it can be done face to face. A review of the ILBF is about to begin and the Committee reviewed its Terms of Reference and Priorities in light of the additional funding, and also to align with the strategy. The amended Terms of Reference will be forwarded to the Board for offline approval before the review commences.
- 5.2 Áine Walsh presented the ILBF Strategy for 2022-26 outlining that the primary function of the ILBF is cultural rather than economic but, while the ILBF is not expected to act as a lever for significant additional investment, it is worth noting that including its levered match the ILBF contributes £4.6 million to the local production sector – both into the Irish Language production cluster and into the Northern Ireland fact/ent production sector more generally. Audience figures in NI for RTE and TG4 are not available, however extrapolated figures from both coupled with local audience figures from BBC would indicate that the target of 25,000 per week is generally reached or exceeded.
- 5.3 Priorities are varied but we are very keen to fund educational and content aimed at children, and to expand digital content with additional funding. Also looking at getting the sector to grow and develop through a wider audience. We want to continue to focus on partnerships with key broadcasters and have regular events to bring them together, eg producers day works well for getting local producers access to commissioners. The BFI Young Audience Content Fund and other additional funders have enabled us to co-produce bigger and better productions.
- 5.4 Looking ahead there is additional funding of approx. £1.9m for the next financial year. With this we want to see more ambitious projects and will be increasing budgets overall, although not drastically. We are interested in funding more radio projects and are engaging with RTÉ and BBC Radio Ulster to produce more content. We would like an easily accessible portal for ILBF content as it is currently difficult to find on BBC and having a central place would be beneficial to Irish speakers. Upping training and skills development will allow an increase in the number of trainee positions and advanced schemes to continue to support new and emerging director talent. We want to focus on the low budget drama sector, bespoke training in writing, script editing, and lots of shadowing opportunities for ILBF funded drama. We have to remain flexible in terms of changing sector needs and maintaining regular engagement with the sector to ensure a pool of talent remains available.

- 5.5 The Chairwoman thanked Áine for presenting to the Board and noted that the same process will be utilised for the USBF at the June meeting. The Chairwoman also stated that she would be keen to talk to Richard Hanna and Róise about whether the Board should make independent communication to the NIO. The Board agreed that the Chairwoman would draft a letter to the NIO stating that while we acknowledge our thanks for the funding, it doesn't wholly capture the ethos of what was suggested in New Decade New Approach.
- 5.6 The CEO added that it is very noticeable that the partnership with TG4 is leading to the sector attracting further opportunities that aren't funded by the ILBF. While economic value is not the primary focus of the ILBF, its economic impact is still significant. It is one of the stable pillars on which the sector is built. Before the ILBF there were no companies in NI producing content for TG4.

#### NI Heritage and Archive Group

- 5.8 Peter Weil gave a brief introduction to the Heritage and Archive Strategy as a positioning document, a summary of some achievements, where we are today and where we hope to go. It is a work in progress and needs more detail, linkages to PfG etc. The key headline is not particularly good. If you look at nations and region in terms of archive, we are the only one without a centralised archive. There is no public body in NI that has specific responsibility for our archive and no agreed policy. Almost every region and country has its own archive strategy. This is also time sensitive as tapes degenerate over time.
- 5.9 Francis Jones highlighted the importance of collaborative working with DfC partners, the screen sector etc which has unlocked increased funding and allowed us to bring in additional staff. A key project is the BAI archiving scheme 2 which comes to an end in Summer 2022 and the BFI Digitisation Scheme which is due to finish in 2023. Maintaining a close relationship with BFI as key funder has helped raise the profile and has grown expertise. In terms of activity, the previous 4 years has focused on preservation and digitisation. The next strategy period will shift to concentrating on realising public value of all the preserved material and repurposing activities with marketing for a steady stream of content on social media, the website, online partnerships with Libraries NI, NMNI, Tourism NI. The last full quarter had over 100,000 views across different platforms with the same period last year at 18,000.
- 5.10 The Chairwoman thanked Francis for his presentation and suggested contacting the DfC Permanent Secretary to highlight the importance of preservation and funding. The CEO added that we need commitment from DfC that Northern Ireland Screen is the public body responsible for moving image.
- 5.11 The next step is to present the archive activity within the context of Programme for Government, although we have struggled to get traction with this in the past. It could be enhanced by articulating the benefits to society and what would be lost; how could we frame the paper more in terms of responsibilities; cultural and societal values to be available. The Board were content that we do more work on shaping the document along these lines.
- 5.12 Susan Picken emphasised that addressing PfG is important and that it was important to ensure PRONI was supportive of any future proposals Northern Ireland Screen tabled with Communities.
- 5.13 The Chairwoman will discuss further after the meeting in terms of a draft response.

### SECWG

- 5.14 Bernard McCloskey updated the Board on how busy the CLCs have been during the pandemic with huge numbers of teachers engaging with online programmes, although there is still concern about access to programmes for young people without good broadband. There continues to be huge demand for Screenworks through IntoFilm as presently delivered online. The Board acknowledged the support given to CLCs and the work they have been doing.

### USBF

- 5.15 Richard Hanna noted that the recent Digital Content call had been very successful and that a second call would be launched. He noted the need for a centralised portal for Ulster-Scots digital content and that the Ulster-Scots Agency is currently developing a new website, Discover US.com, operated by the agency which it hopes to launch within the next 4-6 weeks. The Fund is also looking forward to seeing an uplift in language focused proposals having launched a specific language development call. Richard is very encouraged with the uplift in funding.

### CEFFWG

- 5.16 Susan Picken noted that the Working Group met recently and discussed pulling together the exhibition strategy for DfC for the June meeting. Its ambition is in parallel with Archive to try and progress a four-year funding plan. The sector did well comparatively out of the ACNI renewal fund with £1m going into exhibition. The sector will tentatively look at opening again in May/June with a mix of online and hopefully live industry sessions towards the end of the year. A lot of behind the scenes work continues on the Destination Hub with a green light expected in June.

### Skills/Training

- 5.17 Nothing further to add.

### Investment Committee

- 5.18 Elaine Sperber noted that a number of projects had been approved since the last Board meeting, all are listed in the CEO's Report. In response to a question from Elaine, Áine stated that the ILBF is coming to the end of a very successful 3-year development period with the Canada Media Fund which she is hoping will be renewed.
- 5.19 The Chairwoman thanked Elaine for agreeing to take over as Chair of the Investment Committee.

## **6.0 Strategy Development Update**

- 6.1 The Department is reviewing the Mid-Term Evaluation and once comments are received these will be shared with the Board. We are almost ready to submit documents to the Department for the business case.

- 6.2 SMIL is progressing but is proving challenging due to the volume of work involved. The key is delivery of a volumetric stage as soon as possible. Getting this to market is the key building block on which SMIL will grow into the success it should be.
- 6.3 The BBC Partnership Agreement is in good shape, reaffirmed by the recent re-commissioning of Bloodlands. In terms of a public announcement, it was agreed with the Director-General that the BBC's engagement with BHS/SMIL will be the headline within the Agreement. Therefore a public announcement can't take place until the BBC has formally confirmed its intention – expected in April. The final Partnership Agreement will be circulated when finalised.

## 7.0 Marketing Calendar

- 7.1 Mary McVey confirmed that a lot is still happening in an online format with continued engagement from local companies. The Value Report is almost ready to go to print and will be circulated to the Board once completed.
- 7.2 The Board thanked Mary for the work involved in this report which is very impressive. The inclusion of personal stories is compelling and works very well within the context of the industry.
- 7.3 Elaine noted how useful it is to receive the media clips summary.
- 7.4 Andrew Reid reminded the Board that the NI Talent Showcase is currently live and a link to watch the shorts and feature film, Black Medicine, can be requested.

## 8.0 Any Other Business


- 8.1 No other business was discussed.

## 9.0 Date of Next Meeting

- 9.1 The date of the next meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2021 at 11am via Zoom.**

Point	Detail	Actioned by	Update
2.1	Explore a possible set visit with Minister Dodds when response to Chairwoman's letter is received	CEO	
5.1	Amended ILBF Terms of Reference to be forwarded to the Board for offline approval before the ILBF review commences	Anne Dorbie	
5.5	Draft a letter to the NIO acknowledging thanks for the funding, but stating it doesn't capture the ethos of what was suggested in New Decade New Approach	Chairwoman	
5.10	Chairwoman to write to DfC Minieter.	Chairwoman	
5.13	Discuss a draft response to Programme for Government submissio	Chairwoman/ CEO/Anne Dorbie	

6.1	Share DfE comments on Mid-Term Evaluation with the Board once received	CEO	
6.3	Share BBC Partnership Agreement with the Board once finalised	CEO	
7.1	Circulate hard and soft copies of the Value Report to the Board once finalised	Mary McVey	

Signed:   
(Chairwoman)

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> June 2021