

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 3rd December 2019**11am, Tuesday 3rd December 2019****Northern Ireland Screen, 21 Alfred Street, Belfast**

Present: Rotha Johnston (Chairwoman), Elaine Sperber, Michael Kuhn, Adeline Dinsmore, Patrick Barr, Roise ni Bhaoill, Fionnuala Deane, Michael Fanning, Richard Hanna, Susan Picken, Sheila Fleming

In attendance: Richard Williams (CEO), Linda Martin (Director of Finance and Corporate Services), Andrew Reid (Head of Production), Aine Walsh (Head of ILBF), Mary McVey (Marketing Manager), Marie Shivers (PA to CEO)

Apologies: Greg Maguire, Mark Huffam, Brenda Romero, Bernard McCloskey (Head of Education)

No conflicts of interest were noted.

Elaine Sperber suggested the use of name tags due to new members present on the Board.

1.0 Minutes of the Board meeting of 10th September 2019

- 1.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed, proposed as a true and fair reflection of the meeting by Patrick Barr and seconded by Michael Kuhn.
- 1.2 The Chairwoman suggested that during the forthcoming visit to the London Screen Academy, it would also be useful to visit the Ada, the National College for Digital Skills. The Game of Thrones economic impact exercise with Tourism NI is nearly complete with the final report expected soon. A meeting with the new acting DfE Permanent Secretary should be requested. Linda Martin recently met with Invest NI and will bring a risk proposal to the next Audit and Risk Committee meeting. All other action points were completed.

2.0 Chairwoman's Business

- 2.1 The Chairwoman noted the letter from the outgoing Permanent Secretary stating that no commitments should be made due to budget uncertainty. Our response confirmed that we had a 4-year commitment from the Department and could not continue to attract new productions if we followed this instruction. We will continue to operate as per the agreed business plan until we hear otherwise.
- 2.2 The Chairwoman suggested holding a Strategic away day for Board members to review the strategy, as we are at the halfway stage, and as a way for new members to get to know the rest of the Board. The Board agreed. The Executive will explore dates and venues in early February. The Chairwoman will draw up an agenda and invited suggestions for items to discuss.
- 2.3 The Strategic Resources Committee Terms of Reference have been amended as suggested at the last meeting. The Board agreed the change.

3.0 Chief Executive's Report

- 3.1 The CEO noted a large amount of content through the last quarter, with a substantial amount BBC content. Dublin Murders is probably the most high profile with Almost Never and Pablo for children's TV. Independent Film is also doing extremely well with Ordinary Love and A Bump Along the Way receiving great reviews. Independent film The Last Rifleman will begin pre-production in early February and filming in April. The DoubleBand documentary on Seamus Heaney recently screened to great reviews despite it not being well advertised.
- 3.2 We are very excited with our investment in Paleo Pines, an interactive game from local company Italic Pig, which marks a breakthrough for our games sector given the scale of the publisher investment in the project.
- 3.3 We are still awaiting confirmation whether the Game of Thrones prequel will film in Northern Ireland.
- 3.4 An indicative letter from the BFI has been received but we are still awaiting formal confirmation of ILBF/USBF funding
- 3.5 The CEO updated the Board on issues associated with the Belfast Film Centre.
- 3.6 The recruitment of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services position has been delayed as a result of the need to regrade the position. We are working through the issues and hope to have it finalised by early January.
- 3.7 Demand for studio space has not dropped off despite the current value of sterling. Demand in London is putting pressure on available space UK wide. The Board discussed the issue of studio availability in Northern Ireland and agreed to discuss at the Strategic away day along with what the incentives are to get people to NI and how we can forge relationships for medium- and long-term sources of production.
- 3.8 The Chairwoman suggested it would be good to have Paula Campbell give an overview of the current trainees and an evaluation of the impact of training at the Strategic away day.

4.0 Finance, Audit and Governance

Risk Register

- 4.1 The CEO summarised the changes to the risk register emphasising that active production activity is currently underway with The Northman in Belfast Harbour Studios.
- 4.2 The Board had a discussion on a number of the key risks facing the sector.
- 4.3 The Board approved the risk register.

Audit and Risk Committee update

- 4.4 Sheila Fleming provided an update on the recent meeting noting that the budget re-phasing exercise along with the Management Accounts, Language Funds and the Permanent Secretary letter were discussed. Management accepts the recommendations from internal audit.

Management Accounts

- 4.5 Linda Martin presented the Accounts with the following significant variances highlighted:
- Screen Fund cashflow is under budget by £549k due to project timing. Although cashflow is under budget in the October accounts, currently an overspend is forecast by the year end. This will be managed to ensure the cash allocation will not be exceeded;
 - We still await confirmation of the funding as indicated by DCMS to carry forward the language funds at the same level into 2020/2021. BFI expect confirmation imminently. Both funds have made significant investments in awards which are currently conditional on the funding being contracted;
 - Overheads and salary costs have been marginally rephased and are on track with forecast to the year end.
- 4.6 The CEO noted that the table on the last page captures commitments and is a lot more revealing.

Budget re-phasing

- 4.7 Due to the scale and nature of demand and the genres areas where there were pressures on the budget for the 1st half of the strategy, a rephasing exercise of the remaining 2 years' budget has been carried out. The exercise was primarily necessary due to changes in activity against large-scale production partly brought on by the delay and subsequent cancellation of the prequel at Titanic Studios; and the cancellation of Krypton at Belfast Harbour Studios. Effectively, a year of largescale activity has been lost.
- 4.8 Discussion with the Department on the budget rephasing was undertaken and this has now been agreed. We have made it clear that we are going to stay within the tolerances set but that we respond to demand due to the nature of the industry.
- 4.9 It would be good to explore with the BFI/BFC whether they have any information on UK expenditure and what Northern Ireland's proportion of this is. It would also be good to discuss this at the Strategic away day along with our approach to the Partnership Agreement with the BBC for the next strategy period.
- 4.10 The Board agreed that the Strategic Resources Committee has the power to agree this rephasing and agreed that they are content with the process.

Budget 2020-21

- 4.11 The rephasing of the current budget has had minimal impact on the forecast budget for 2020-21. We are effectively in year 3 of the 4-year casework presented and approved by the Department with very little change. There are no other adjustments against the year 3 figures. As a result, the Board were content to approve the 2020-21 Budget.

Strategic Resources Committee update

- 4.12 The Chairwoman summarised what was discussed at the last SRC meeting including staff regrading and new structure, current HR issues, and the renewal of the current office building lease. The CEO updated the Board on The Pixel Mill noting that we are through

the first cycle which was very successful. The Executive are currently working through start-up phase issues and are reviewing the current model with a view to improving it.

5.0 Committee Updates

Screen Education and Careers Working Group

- 5.1 Academies and programmes are working well with Screenworks already seeing real benefits. SERC are running an excellent HSE/HND programme for young people getting on to a degree course with the first two years free. This programme is linked with Napier University who are one of the leading film and TV universities. A Committee member had raised an issue around documentation with placing students which will be looked into. The Committee commended the work that all on the ground are doing, resulting in a quality experience for young people. The BBC are setting up an educational group.

Investment Committee/Investment Report/KPI Report

- 5.2 A block of big spend was approved at the latest Investment Committee meeting and we are beginning to look at projects for funding from April onwards. Clips from recent projects were shown to the Board.

ILBF

- 5.3 Róise noted the recent Cognisence Report on audience research was broadly in line with previous research reporting. The Fund can't generate more content unless there is more funding available or BBC/TG4 make a bigger contribution, both of which at the moment are unlikely. In terms of greater variety, most of the applications are for factual documentary despite advertising for other genres. The other point raised is that the majority of content is accessed through various channel players and not the TV
- 5.4 At their recent Investment Committee, the ILBF awarded funding to the first original animation from Paper Owl, a Dog Ears feature length documentary on Puffin Rock and a number of fact/ent returning series. Lomax in Eirean won an award for TV programme of the year at the Oireachtas Communication Awards in October.

USBF

- 5.5 Richard Hanna noted there has been one meeting since taking over chairmanship of the USBF which has been a steep learning curve. The Chairman is keen that post screening of the productions that we fund could be an opportunity for them to be accessible to a greater extent than they seem to be at the moment. Ulster-Scots is not confined to Northern Ireland, there are areas in the Republic too and a growing appetite in the North East of the United States. Richard noted he would welcome suggestions or proposals on how he can accelerate his engagement with the work around Ulster-Scots. The CEO will pick this up along with colleagues in the BBC.
- 5.6 Richard Hanna is keen for the USBF to meet to share priorities and areas of interest within the Ulster-Scots community so that it might focus applications and align them with the Ulster-Scots community. The Chairwoman noted that confirmation of funding should be received ahead of a strategic refocus.

The Executive left the meeting

6.0 HR issues

- 6.1 The Chairwoman noted that due to the current regarding exercise the CEO's grade also needs to be reviewed and benchmarked across the public sector. The Strategic Resources Committee can commission the necessary paperwork but the Board needs to be aware of what is involved. The Board noted it was worth looking at similar industry-based positions, Film London for example. The Board agreed this way forward. The Chairwoman will update when information has been received.

The Executive returned to the meeting

7.0 Any Other Business

- 7.1 The Board should be invited to all screenings and events.

8.0 Date of Next Meeting

- 8.1 The date of the next meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday 10th March 2020 at 11am.**

Point	Detail	Actioned by	Update
1.2	Chase meeting with Acting Permanent Secretary	MLS	
2.2	Organise a Strategic Away Day for Board members and Executive	Chairwoman/ CEO	
3.4	CEO to contact BFI regarding ILBF/USBF funding	CEO	
4.9	Explore with the BFI/BFC whether they have any information on UK expenditure and what NI's proportion of this is	Andrew Reid	
5.5	Discuss proposals on how USBF Chair can become familiar with the work around Ulster-Scots	CEO/BBC	

Signed:



(Chairwoman)

Date: 10th March 2020