

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 9TH JUNE 2020

11am, Tuesday 9th June 2020

Via Zoom

Present: Rotha Johnston (Chairwoman), Michael Kuhn, Elaine Sperber, Róise Ní Bhaoill, Michael Fanning, Richard Hanna, Susan Picken, Sheila Fleming, Greg Maguire, Brenda Romero, Adeline Dinsmore, Mark Huffam, Peter Weil, Camel Mullan, Tom Gray

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

Apologies: Fionnuala Deane

No conflicts of interest were noted.

Rotha welcomed the new members to the Board and short introductions were made for their benefit.

1.0 Minutes of the Board meetings of 9th March 2020 (Away Day), 10th March 2020 and 27th March 2020

9th March 2020 – Away Day

- 1.1 The Board were content with the accuracy of these minutes which were agreed and signed.
- 1.2 The Chairwoman will continue to extend dialogue with NIO and DCMS regarding New Decade, New Approach and has made initial contact with the NIO Director-General. Marie will arrange a meeting to discuss further.
- 1.3 The CEO is to have a meeting this week to continue discussions on SMIL and Greg Maguire will set a date for a presentation for any interested Board members. Marie will liaise with Greg to arrange and will keep the Board updated on both these actions.
- 1.4 Ongoing discussions with DfC continue around the alignment of funding from 1 year to 4 years.
- 1.5 The Chairwoman briefed new members of the Board on the details around the BBC Partnership Agreement which came to an end in March 2020, noting that the Strategic Resources Committee agreed that the Chairwoman would write to the outgoing BBC Director-General. The CEO is in discussions with Peter Johnston on how we can build the Partnership up again based on what is already there and also include the recent BBC3 initiative. He hopes to have more of an update at the September meeting. It was also noted that there is no Northern Ireland representative on the BBC Board.

- 1.6 The CEO updated the Board on the background to regionalising the PACT/BECTU agreement noting that while this is critical to the ongoing success of the industry it is a big ask and won't happen overnight. We will have to wait until lockdown eases and production begins before we seek to pursue it.
- 1.7 The Value Report is in progress with the deadline for print by December 2020. The Chairwoman noted it would be helpful for the new Board members to have sight of the previous Value Reports.

10th March 2020

- 1.8 The Board were content with the accuracy of these minutes which were agreed and signed.
- 1.9 A first draft of the document of evidence-based work to help understand our competitiveness with regard to suppliers and crew will be delivered on 15th June 2020.
- 1.10 The presentation to the CBI CEO will be carried over to the next meeting due to the current situation.
- 1.11 We are seeking to sustain a reasonable profile throughout this period although Covid is the dominant theme.

27th March 2020

- 1.12 The Board were content with the accuracy of these minutes which were agreed and signed.
- 1.13 The Coronavirus Development Fund is up and running and going very well. The first commission has been announced by Waddell Media for a gardening-style programme. The CEO confirmed impact will be recorded and reported to the Board in due course.

2.0 Chairwoman's business

- 2.1 The Chairwoman thanked the Board for completing the recent Effectiveness Questionnaire. There were a small number of points to be looked at around the size and skills of the Board. The Board is slightly larger than normal but a number of board membership terms will come to an end within the next 10 months. The Chairwoman asked to be contacted with any concerns or questions and will reflect the results back to the Department.

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

- 3.1 The CEO reassured the Board that Northern Ireland Screen is continuing its primary functions despite the limitations of lockdown, and indicated that he is pleased by the volume of activity we are managing to achieve in these circumstances. The recent BAFTA nominations are a good reminder of the high water mark the screen industry has reached with Line of Duty, Game of Thrones and Derry Girls all receiving BAFTA nominations.
- 3.2 The progression back to work is steady with the Gaming sector still going strong attested to by the significant story on the Hypixel/Riot Games project coming out of Derry. Live action/scripted is getting back to work with The Northman and Secret Life of Boys leading the way.

- 3.3 The Coronavirus Development Fund is progressing well with the first commission achieved by Waddell Media. We hope that Linenmill Studios will receive planning permission for the Game of Thrones studio tour which is key to maximising the tourism legacy of Game of Thrones.
- 3.4 We were disappointed not to have sanction to release the Freelance Bursary Fund but were extremely pleased that Future Screens provided £50,000 to give out grants of £1,000 to freelancers to present their ideas on how the screen industry can get back up and running. The Board thanked Future Screens for this contribution and Greg Maguire for the initial suggestion.
- 3.5 Our single biggest issue is the uncertainty around the budget due to the current situation. We are pushing back on requests for savings by restating that with the number of commitments we have, there is no money available to give back. We will update the Department for the Economy at the September monitoring round and we have a meeting scheduled soon to discuss this further with the Department for Communities.
- 3.6 In response to a question the CEO confirmed that the moment for the Freelancer Bursary Scheme has passed. There is a possibility that the Department may agree to it at a later date but we are now shifting to getting production back up and running, and getting the Freelancers their jobs back is now a higher priority than compensating them for the wages they have lost over the last few months.
- 3.7 Michael Kuhn raised the question of insurance and asked whether a Northern Ireland solution might be worth pursuing. The CEO thought it unlikely that the NI Executive would get involved in this issue and hoped that the PACT/BFI/BFC push on Treasury would be successful. The CEO suggested that he and Andrew Reid speak to insurance brokers to gauge whether there would be scope for some insurers to look at NI as a relatively safe place for production to return to first given the reduced infection rate, the scale and density of Northern Ireland and the other measures being put in place.

Performance Indicator Report and Investment Report

- 3.8 Shane Helferty noted that these Reports were discussed in detail at the recent Strategic Resources Committee meeting. The KPI report is on track with the majority of targets met or exceeded. Similarly, there was nothing to add on the Investment Report and both Reports were noted by the Board.

4.0 Finance, Audit and Governance

Risk Register

- 4.1 The CEO stated that the Risk Register had changed radically and was dominated by Covid and lockdown regulations, as well as keeping on top of Brexit-related issues. The Chairwoman suggested that the summary of various coronavirus changes be merged into one. The Risk Register will be amended accordingly.

Audit and Risk Committee Update

- 4.2 There were no points to raise from the recent Audit and Risk Committee meeting.

Management Accounts to 31st January 2020

- 4.3 The Management Accounts were discussed in depth at the Audit and Risk and Strategic Resources Committee meetings, and there is nothing further to report to the Board.

Strategic Resources Committee Update

- 4.4 Shane Helferty outlined our need to progress the Mid Term Evaluation of Opening Doors 2 and to immediately progress to the putting together of the new strategy and its independent appraisal. He reported that he was exploring whether SIB could undertake the necessary consultancy work. He also noted that the time frame was extremely tight.
- 4.5 The Chairwoman informed the new members of the background to the restructuring process that centred on the recruitment of a new COO. Due to the Interim COO's post ending in July, the Board unanimously agreed to support a request to the Department for this position to be extended by 3 months.

5.0 Other Committee Updates

Skills/Training

- 5.1 Andrew Reid reported that we have adjusted our bursary rules temporarily to enable applicants to claim 100% of the costs of training courses, up to £2,000, with a very positive response. We have also moved most of our training online, prioritising Covid 19 training on health and safety to help get productions back up and running. More than 50 people have undertaken this so far. Skillset are releasing free online Covid training for all shortly. Overall, the level of engagement in training across all sectors has been very high.

SECWG

- 5.2 Adeline Dinsmore clarified that the school system is struggling with teachers stretched trying to keep in touch with children and parents. Schools that are more technologically up to speed have managed better than others.
- 5.3 Bernard McCloskey reiterated that home learning, especially for those families who don't have any form of technology at home, was proving extremely difficult. CLC activity on this has been extensive helping teachers as much as possible with the delivery of the curriculum online. Into Film are still hoping to launch their VOD system for testing in schools in September. This will be quite challenging but testing has gone reasonably well so far. The Screenworks programme is going well and the Animation and Gaming Academies have been hugely successful. Work on rescheduling postponed exhibitions and festivals is proving challenging but a working group has been set up to aid consultation and ensure there are no clashes. It will take time to get these up and running again.
- 5.4 The Chairwoman noted that we should inform the Department of Education of our concerns on this issue. The CLCs are in a prime position to be able to advise the Education Authority on new approaches to delivering the curriculum online. This is a good opportunity for the Board to contribute to the new Strategy and the CLCs should continue to seek out case studies.

Investment Committee

- 5.5 Andrew Reid noted that our attention is now geared around recovery planning and our website is updated daily with information on the practical things people will require when putting protocols into place for returning to production. Andrew thanked Roma Cunningham for the research she has undertaken to locate available suppliers to add to this information. Feedback from productions across all sectors looking for suppliers has been very positive.
- 5.6 Andrew confirmed that a number of companies have been in contact looking for available studio space. The exercise on the comparative costs case study therefore will need to be completed by the end of June.
- 5.7 Andrew informed the Board that the Grand Ideas round funded by Future Screens launched on Friday 5th June and will close on Tuesday 10th June. More than 50 applications have been received and will be checked to ensure the applicants are eligible. Six seminars with Lord David Puttnam will take place over the summer for writers, directors and producers who are about to make their first feature.

ILBF

- 5.8 Róise Ní Bhoill noted that most of the ILBF productions have been affected by Covid 19 lockdown regulations, except for animation and online magazine programming. Interviews will take place this week for the recruitment of the next round of new entrants, but courses won't begin until January because the BBC are not currently in a position to provide the same level of training. The ILBF are pleased to be involved in a new drama development initiative with the BBC and TG4 to develop new writers. Celtic Media Festival presentations will take place online on Facebook this week. Two ILBF funded films, Dearcán Media's Michael Davitt – Radacach and Below the Radar's Scéal na Beatha are in the running for awards.
- 5.9 Aine Walsh added that a couple of productions are tentatively starting up again, and the Daniel O'Donnell programme, Daniel Sa Bhaile, rated very highly on TG4 with considerable press coverage.

USBF

- 5.10 Richard Hanna noted that a number of applications were awarded funding at a recent USBF Committee meeting for traditional broadcasting, and a call for digital content projects launched recently will close at the beginning of July.

Marketing Calendar

- 5.11 Mary McVey noted the recent BAFTA nominations for Line of Duty, Derry Girls and Game of Thrones. The BAFTA Award ceremony will take place on Friday 31st July on BBC One and the BAFTA Craft Awards ceremony on Friday 17th July.

6.0 Any Other Business

- 6.1 The Chairwoman reminded Board members that the appraisal review process is now due. She will prepare the necessary documentation and be in touch with members over the holiday period.


6.2 It was agreed that the September Board Meeting would be via Zoom.

6.3 The Chairwoman also confirmed that an online induction process will be arranged for the new members of the Board.

7.0 Date of Next Meeting

7.1 The date of the next meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday 16th September 2020 at 11am via Zoom.**

Point	Detail	Actioned by	Update
1.2	Arrange meeting with RJ, RW, AW, RnB with NIO to discuss New Decade, New Approach. Keep the Board updated	MLS	
1.3	Arrange a presentation with GM/RW on SMIL to interested Board members. Keep the Board updated	MLS	
1.7	Provide new Board members with copies of the previous two Value Reports	MLS/MMcV	Completed
1.10	Possible presentation to the CBI CEO on teacher skills development and other areas	CEO	
2.1	Notify the results of the Board Effectiveness Survey to the Department	Chairwoman	
3.7	Andrew and Richard to speak to insurance brokers to see if there might be a possibility that insurers could look at NI as a place where production could first start back up again.	RW/AR	Completed
4.1	Merge various coronavirus Risks on summary page of Risk Register	SH	Completed
4.5	Request the Dept extend Interim COO's post for a further 3 months	Chairwoman	No longer required

Signed: 

 (Chairwoman)

Date: 16th September 2020