

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 20TH JUNE 2023

11am, Tuesday 20th June 2023

Boardroom, Ulster University, York Street, Belfast

- Present:** David Sterling (Chair), Greg Maguire, Michael Fanning, Peter Weil, Tom Gray, Carmel Mullan, Fionnuala Deane, Susan Picken, Richard Hanna
- In attendance:** Richard Williams (CEO), Anne Dorbie (Chief Operating Officer), Áine Walsh (Head of ILBF), Mary McVey (Marketing Manager), David McConnell (Education and Careers Manager), Francis Jones (Archive Manager), Laura Higgins (Accountant), Marie Shivers (PA to CEO)
- Apologies:** Mark Huffam, Róise Ní Bhaoill, Brenda Romero, Andrew Reid (Chief Cultural Officer)

No conflicts of interest were noted.

1.0 Minutes of the Board meeting of 28th March 2023

- 1.1 The Board were content with the minutes and they were signed.
- 1.2 The Diversity Action Plan, Investment Committee Innovation and Belfast Stories actions were carried forward to the September meeting. The meeting on sustainability is taking place tomorrow.

2.0 Chair's business

- 2.1 The Chair, as requested by DfE, will carry out a Board Effectiveness exercise shortly. A questionnaire will be issued in due course and the Chair will have discussions individually with Board members before the September meeting.
- 2.2 In response to a question from Tom Gray the CEO confirmed that we have been engaged with activity around US Special Envoy Joe Kennedy's visit. We hope he will amplify and profile Studio Ulster in the States. We also hope Studio Ulster will feature within the Investment Summit in September.

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

- 3.1 The CEO reported that a potential funding crisis with DfC had been averted with confirmation of standstill funding (still a cut against agreed strategy). He emphasised that the crisis was the result of Northern Ireland Screen not having ALB status within DfC meaning that our funding settlement falls to the bottom of the departmental waterfall.
- 3.2 A bigger challenge is the US writers' strike which has already impacted on Bulero and is now beginning to impact other areas worldwide. CEO attended the first CINE event which illustrated strongly that we are targeting a diverse range of trainees and that the trainees have much to offer. He also noted with pleasure that the current and previous Chairs of the RTS Awards Committee are Aim High graduates.

KPI & Investment Reports

- 3.3 The Investment Report was noted.

4.0 Finance, Audit and Governance

Risk Register

- 4.1 Most issues have been discussed already, namely the writers' strike and resultant postponement of Bulero. The Chair noted the reasonable settlement from DfE. The downgraded Language Funds risk was noted. And it was noted that the operational management risk has been split out.
- 4.2 The Board approved the Risk Register.

Audit and Risk Committee Update

- 4.3 Carmel Mullan noted that the Committee discussed the Risk Register and Budget for 2023-24 in detail and agreed the workplan for the year. All policies are up to date. The Business Continuity Plan and IT audits are complete with only a few minor recommendations. The Risk Management audit is complete awaiting the report. A satisfactory result with two minor recommendations was achieved.

DACs

- 4.4 One NextGen DAC was reviewed, to the value of £40,000, and was approved by the Board.

Budget 2023-24

- 4.5 We are working on scenario planning to manage the DfC reduction in budget of £130,000. DfE's letter of offer confirms a decrease in their funding of £1m. ILBF and USBF have received a small 2% increase. Lottery funding has reduced by 50%. PRONI, BFI, BBC and recoupment figures remain the same. CINE, now in the second year, will increase. BFI Skills Cluster, which commences this year, has a £300,000 annual budget. The Chair noted this position is much better than might have been expected a few weeks ago.

Strategic Resources Committee Update

- 4.6 All issues discussed at the last meeting have been covered. The Committee reviewed the outturn for last year, the budget for this year together with current HR business.

5.0 Other Committee Updates

ILBF

- 5.1 Northern Ireland Screen funded projects were unsuccessful at the recent Celtic Media Festival, but they were up against stiff competition. Trainees attended, some volunteered and all got a lot out of the festival. The Fund currently has an Audio and Digital Content round open. We are supporting a drama series, in partnership with TG4, BBC NI, Screen Ireland and BAI which will be shot in Donegal and posted in NI. The Fund is arranging for training in writing for kids' television/translation to improve the writing of age appropriate language and

for an acting workshop to increase the pool of NI based Irish speaking actors for screen. We are working with the Irish Government on seeking to extend the three-year partnership agreement.

USBF

- 5.2 Richard Hanna noted the USBF detail in the CEO Report and flagged up that the upcoming digital call had been heavily oversubscribed, a positive challenge which comes at the end of 2 year push to expand the USBF's support of and utilisation of digital content beyond linear television.

Investment Committee

- 5.3 Peter Weil highlighted some recent successes including Blue Lights which secured very good audience figures, Hope Street series 3, Dalglish series 2 and a very good review for the factual entertainment series Made up In Belfast.

NIHAWG

- 5.4 Francis Jones informed the Board that renewal of the UTV Archive Partnership is at a critical juncture. Annabel Jackson conducted a review on the workings of the partnership, undertaking consultations with partners and users for a benchmarking exercise. Headlines from the report are encouraging but challenges remain. We outperformed on many of the original targets including digitisation, with public engagement described in the report as world leading. Negotiations are underway for an extension of the partnership and we hope to hear within the next few weeks. A copy of the report will be circulated to the Board.
- 5.5 Pointing out the value of connectedness and partnership, Peter Weil noted that Cinemagic was undertaking an animation workshop with a special needs school he had introduced Cinemagic to.

Skills/Training

- 5.6 Our skills activity has substantially expanded since the beginning of the new strategy and uplift in funding. Good appointments have been made to an expanded skills department team, all with sectoral knowledge which is useful in engaging with companies. There are a significant number of trainees going onto HTTYD. The BFI Skills cluster is being rolled out and we received good feedback from BFI noting that our cluster proposal was the most integrated with the strongest connections into public funders and the biggest emphasis on innovation.

CEFFWG

- 5.7 Docs Ireland launched this week with strong pre-sales. Cinemagic continues to do great work with attendance back to pre-covid levels. The festival launches on 9th September, 20 young people will travel to Los Angeles for a showcase. Figures show that Nerve Centre's Our Place in Space received over 1 million visitors. Newcastle Cinema is doing an event around the 40th anniversary of the film Cal. There seems to be no screenable prints of this film so we should ask the BFI for their help. The Chair should write a formal letter noting its significance.

SECWG

- 5.8 Busy end of term period across the CLCs and Into Film who continue their great partnerships with Barefoot Computing and Adobe. Nerve Belfast's location in W5 continues to improve collaboration with Microsoft. A recent Partnership showcase at W5 for school principals was well attended and showed the impact made. Declan Carville and the Amma Centre delivered a programme, Transition, which explores the anxieties of young people transitioning from primary to post-primary school. Dog Ears and Cartoon Saloon are partnering with Into Film to produce an education resource around Puffin Rock. Fionnuala Deane added it was a great experience working with Into Film.

6.0 Marketing Calendar

- 6.1 A very successful awards season for Northern Ireland is now coming to an end. The recent Annecy Animation Festival had a strong presence with seven local companies attending. Galway is coming up in July and we are supporting 20 companies to attend Gamescom, the biggest games interactive conference, in Cologne in August. Some of our trainees hope to attend the Edinburgh TV Festival in August and the Toronto International Film Festival will take place in September.

7.0 Any Other Business

- 7.1 The Chair expressed his thanks to Greg Maguire whose term on the Board comes to an end at the end of June. Greg is the longest serving member of the Board and has made a substantial contribution across the games and animation sectors and across skills and as a member of the Investment Committee. The Board thanked Greg for his service.

8.0 Date of Next Meeting

- 8.1 The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 19th September 2023.

Point	Detail	Actioned by	Update
1.2	Bring Diversity Action Plan to the next meeting	Anne Dorbie	DAP completed
1.2	Issue report on Investment Committee Innovation	CEO/Peter Weil	Included in all future Inv Cte papers
1.2	Presentation on Belfast Stories at the next meeting	Susan Picken	December 2023
2.1	Undertake a Board Effectiveness exercise	Chair	Report with Chair
5.4	Circulate a copy of the Education Evaluation	Marie Shivers	Completed
5.7	Write formal letter to the BFI for help identifying a copy of the film 'Cal'	Chair	Completed

Signed: _____

Date: 19/9/23