

## **MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 12<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2023**

**11am, Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2023**  
**Boardroom, Northern Ireland Screen**

**Present:** David Sterling (Chair), Michael Fanning, Peter Weil, Tom Gray, Carmel Mullan, Susan Picken, Richard Hanna, Fionnuala Deane, Roise Ni Bhaoill

**In attendance:** Richard Williams (CEO), Andrew Reid (Chief Content Officer), Áine Walsh (Head of ILBF), Mary McVey (Head of Marketing), David McConnell (Education and Careers Manager), Francis Jones (Archive Manager), Marie Shivers (PA to CEO)

**Apologies:** Mark Huffam, Brenda Romero, Laura Higgins (Accountant)

No conflicts of interest were noted.

### **1.0 Minutes of the Board meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

- 1.1 The Board were content with the minutes, and they were signed.
- 1.2 All matters arising have been completed.

### **2.0 Chair's business**

- 2.1 The Board are currently down two members with three due to complete their first terms in June 2024. It has been agreed in principle with the Department that a skills audit will be undertaken early next year to ensure we have the right skillset across the Board. Committee structure will also be reviewed. In the meantime, Richard Hanna has accepted a request to lead the Board in the area of Education and step back from USBF and Tom Gray has stood down from the Audit and Risk Committee moving to the Investment Committee.
- 2.2 Board annual assessments have been completed and will be sent out for signature this week. The Chair apologised for the delay in completing this process.

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

- 3.1 The CEO noted the impressive list of awards and nominations; reported on November's heavy festival programme which had been very successful; noted the appointment of Kerry O'Brien replacing Rory Clifford as Interactive Manager and Judith Workman appointed as the new HR Manager starting in January.
- 3.2 Despite the strikes, we are reporting a huge amount of good news within the screen sector. Andrew Reid was recently in Los Angeles looking at the future pipeline and noted a general sense of positivity. Streamers are generally only looking at slates for 2023 and not yet focussing on 2024. The majority of companies are interested in virtual production. Studio Ulster expansion of Belfast Harbour Studios is on track with the physical building and the tender process for equipment well progressed.

- 3.3 The Staff Questionnaire has issued and the review process is underway. The Top Management Review is also progressing.
- 3.4 The CEO congratulated Áine Walsh on taking over as Chair of the Celtic Media Festival noting that her appointment was an honour not just for her but for the sector here and for Northern Ireland Screen.

#### Key Performance Indicator Report

- 3.5 The CEO presented figures for actual sector spend for the first two years of the current strategy. These are very positive despite the length of the recent US strike action and the effect that has had on the large-scale sector. Television drama has had a stellar performance but all sectors have performed strongly. While these are interim figures, they indicate that we should hit our targets for the 4 years. Constraints on growth pinball between budget limitations, available studio space and available crew. The CEO noted we are in discussions with the Department over what to measure from a 10x point of view. We need to make sure we are capturing the relevant data to demonstrate our contribution to 10x.

#### Investment Report

- 3.8 The Board noted the Investment Report.
- 3.9 Roise ni Bhaoill added that at a recent conference at Maynooth University Alan Esselmont from TG4 praised our schools outreach work which he referenced as an example the Republic of Ireland could follow.

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

#### Risk Register

- 4.1 CEO reported the cyclical finance risk and Studio Ulster as his priority risks stating that he was anxious to reduce the initial burden of financial expectation on Studio Ulster. The overall funding environment for Northern Ireland was discussed.
- 4.2 Architects have been appointed and Mark Cousins has been appointed as Creative Adviser for Belfast Stories. This is good from our point of view as it means 'the other half' of Belfast Stories is going to be audio visual/film/screen dominated. The CEO noted that we have work to do on the Business Case for the screen centre elements. The Chair expressed a wish for the Board to see Mark Cousin's presentation on Belfast Stories.

#### Audit and Risk Committee Update

- 4.3 Carmel updated on the recent Committee meeting. The internal audit review for the year was satisfactory. Some minor recommendations to align with Orange Book will be implemented although some Orange Book recommendations are not practical for an organisation of our size.
- 4.4 The Procurement review is complete and we are awaiting the report. The Review of DfC funding for Education and Culture is still ongoing with the report due in the next quarter. External audit agreed the same timeline for completion of audit work to enable the accounts to be approved at the June 2024 Board meeting.

- 4.5 There are two direct award contracts for Board approval. The Camera and Edit training and Web Hosting contracts were approved by the Board.
- 4.6 The Board congratulated Carmel and the Audit and Risk team for the success of the audit work undertaken.

#### Management Accounts

- 4.7 Overall the news is good and we are on track for a full spend. Despite the considerable budget to be cashflowed in the final quarter, we are ahead of where we were for last year.

#### Strategic Resources Committee Update

- 4.8 Nothing specific to bring to the Board's attention. All items have been addressed under the general Board agenda.

### **5.0 Other Committee Updates**

#### ILBF

- 5.1 Roise added the Committee's congratulations to Áine for becoming Chair elect of the Celtic Media Festival. Delighted to see in the last round an application in for Táin Bó Cúailgne, an epic tale from the Ulster Cycle. Excellent feedback received on Irish language version of Puffin Rock and also great media attention for Rúin na bPortach. Ahead of this year's digital round a seminar on children's content was organised which is impacting positively on the subsequent applications.

The Fund is concentrating on supporting new and emerging talent in drama with a session at the Belfast Media Festival on Irish Language drama, a writing workshop with Myra Zepf; an acting workshop with Tony Devlin and support for trainee positions on Saor Sinn Ó Olc and Aontas. Some awards to note are Best TV programme for Díolta Faoina Luach at the Oireachtas Communication Awards and An Buachaill Gealgháireach picked up a further two awards - International Documentary award at the Chania Film Festival and an Honorary Distinction at the Agean Documentary Festival. Kneecap will have its world premiere at Sundance, making it the first Irish Language film to be selected for Sundance.

#### USBF

- 5.2 A comprehensive report for Ulster-Scots business is contained within the CEO's Report. The next meeting will take place in January.

#### Investment Committee

- 5.3 Peter reported on the recent commitments from the Investment Committee. He also noted that Blue Lights looks set to be recommissioned for a 3<sup>rd</sup> season, as well as the ratings success of Woman in the Wall. He also noted the Broadcast Award nomination for The Finish Line which has been recommissioned for an extended run.

Peter thanked the team for the excellent work that has gone into securing these projects.

## NIHAWG

- 5.4 Francis Jones highlighted the launch of NI Now, a contemporary collection project funded by the BFI in partnership with The Nerve Centre. A new venture, this is about promoting diversity, inclusion and equality in screen heritage collections and we are looking forward to working in collaboration with the content creators. The Creative Response Project is shaping up to be very interesting with the commission of a range of different people - poets, writers, musicians. A project on the Broadcasting Ban is hoped to be ready for Docs Ireland in June. He also reported on the BFI Replay launch which is the culmination of a project started in 2018 with the digitisation of 7000 video tapes on broadcast news and significant events from the 1980s onwards. It is available through the library network.

## Skills/Training

- 5.5 CINE has created 92 opportunities since its inception and currently has 84 trainees. It is going well heading into its last year in April 2024. Core skills work is also going well and with the strike now over we are hoping to place further trainees on How to Train Your Dragon. The BFI Skills Cluster is challenging but progressing - Pathways is doing well, Innovation and Technology is slow having spent only a quarter of the budget but there are enough proposals for the Committee to make a decision on.
- 5.6 The CEO added that CINE is a model for other sectors. While not overly complex it more aggressively targets those that are hardest to reach and all indications are that CINE trainees are being broadly as successful as other trainees. It would be worth discussing further with DfC.

## CEFFWG

- 5.6 Susan reiterated the busy, but very successful, festival period and the need for further discussion on scheduling. BFF audience figures are back to 2019 levels. There is a slight challenge on the horizon with the increase in the minimum wage which may impact all festivals going forward. Film Hub NI now have a regional development focus on the Newcastle area, primarily the Newcastle Community Cinema. A BFI representative on exhibition will be visiting Belfast in February.

## SECWG

- 5.7 Highlight of year was the Moving Image Arts Awards in Derry and Belfast. Two very successful events both with different dynamics but phenomenal feedback has been received on the calibre of projects submitted. The 'So What' piece has connections into further education to help students know their destination and next steps on their career journey. Into Film celebrated their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Excellent feedback received across all key stages on games resources. Sir Ian Livingstone will launch the programme next year. The Independent Review of Education launches at Stormont tomorrow with the issue of the final report.

## **7.0 Marketing Calendar**

- 7.1 The Heist Before Christmas has yet to confirm a release date but the expectation is Christmas Eve. Lift will stream from 12th January and Mary will recirculate the trailer to the Board. New Year is back into awards season with Ross and Tom's next film eligible for Oscar and Bafta listings. Five projects are up for Broadcast awards in February and Sundance takes place in

mid-January. Mary McVey is finalising the year end summary for press which will issue this week.

## 8.0 Any Other Business

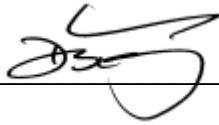
8.1 The Chair wished the Board a Merry Christmas.

## 9.0 Date of Next Meeting

9.1 The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

### Actions

Point	Detail	Actioned by	Update
4.2	Explore possibility of a presentation by Mark Cousins on Belfast Stories	CEO	Ongoing
5.6	Discuss replicating the CINE trainee model with DfC	CEO	Ongoing
7.1	Recirculate the Lift trailer	Mary McVey	Completed

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024