

## **MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 19<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2023**

**11am, Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2023**  
**Boardroom, Northern Ireland Screen**

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

**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:** Fionnuala Deane, Anne Dorbie (Chief Operating Officer), Laura Higgins (Accountant)

No conflicts of interest were noted.

### **1.0 Minutes of the Board meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

1.1 The Board were content with the minutes, and they were signed.

1.2 All matters arising have been completed. The Chair reported positive movement in relation to a rerelease of CAL.

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

2.1 The Chair reflected some feedback from the British Irish Association Conference.

2.2 The Chair reported on a first meeting with Mike Smyth, the newly appointed NI member of the BBC Board. It was a useful meeting where the need for regular engagement both with Northern Ireland Screen and on a wider, local basis was encouraged. Issues around the BBC's withdrawal from Studio Ulster, the Partnership Agreement renewal and the current success of CINE were discussed.

2.3 The Chair noted positive responses to the recent Board Effectiveness review. As follow up, he proposes the following steps:

- a Board Away Day be held in Spring 2024;
- that next year's Board Effectiveness Review be facilitated independently;
- conduct a skills audit of Board composition in conjunction with DfE;
- refresh the induction programme process;
- hold 2 Board meetings a year away from the Boardroom, one of which should be in the North West;
- explore other ways to improve stakeholder relations;
- endeavour to issue Board papers at least 5 days in advance of Board or Committee meetings.

- 2.4 Any additional comments should be directed to the Chair by Monday of next week to enable him to inform the Department of the outcome of this exercise.
- 2.5 Chair will send out completed Board appraisal forms and arrange separate meetings if requested.
- 2.6 The Chair also recently met with DfE's partner team. No major issues were raised.

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

- 3.1 CEO noted the wide range of high-profile projects including Ballywalter's cinema release, *The Lovers on Sky*, *Women in the Wall* on BBC, *Holocaust Ground Zero* on C4, the launch of *Paleo Pines*, and multiple Grierson nominations. He also noted the excellent ScreenWorks careers programme and undertook to circulate it to the Board. He also noted the screen industry was well profiled at the Investment Summit.
- 3.2 Our funding issues have been resolved for the time being with DfE picking up a shortfall in DfC funding. The sectors are generally in a good place except for large-scale due to the Writers/SAG-AFTRA strike and fact/ent due to a depressed UK PSB market. The end of the strikes is not now expected before January. More investment has been made in TV drama and independent film to keep the industry running. If the money contracted to *Bolero* or *HTTYD* is returned due to cancellation of the shows, this would create a challenge in terms of cash flowing.
- 3.3 The UK Public Sector Broadcasting market is gloomy at the moment with limited UK broadcaster commissioning. We are seeking to agree both a new BBC Partnership Agreement and a new Channel 4 MOU but we are wary of committing to these agreements without substantive commitments from the respective broadcasters.
- 3.4 Our skills departments are very active with new ILBF, USBF and Interactive trainees starting their schemes. Cinemagic has also launched its annual film programme.
- 3.5 CEO reported the departure of Lauren from Marketing and Rory, the Interactive Manager, and noted their very positive contribution.

#### Key Performance Indicator Report

- 3.6 The CEO noted that our primary spend KPI was comfortably up with the overall strategy target but that £80m of the projected £226m related to the two Large-Scale projects delayed by the strikes.
- 3.7 The Board was reassured that the impacts of the strike were being managed and that all potential mitigation had been implemented.

#### Investment Report

- 3.8 The Board noted the Investment Report.

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

### Risk Register

- 4.1 The CEO summarised the main risks, namely the Writers/SAG-AFTRA strike, the delay in the Studio Ulster Design, Build and Operate tender, present Irish Government funding for ILBF coming to an end, and the reintroduction of Child licensing as it has become mission critical for the HBO project as its lead cast are under-age.

### Audit and Risk Committee Update

- 4.2 Carmel Mullan updated the Board on the key areas of discussion at the Audit and Risk Committee, firstly the draft Partnership Agreement which will replace the MSFM. She noted two significant improvements relating to the ease of transfer of funds within the Screen Fund and the treatment of recoupment. The Chair agreed this discretion is welcome, but expressed the view that further delegation could be useful and warranted. The CEO recommended that we agree to sign off the document. The Board were given a week to provide any comments before sign off is confirmed with the Department.
- 4.3 Secondly, the Mid-Year Assurance statement which outlines controls that are in place and our compliance with them. One non-compliance is the health and safety policy which is being reviewed. IT issues continue to be reviewed and updated on a six-monthly basis. A number of processes have been put in place and ongoing testing is occurring to pick up any risks.
- 4.4 The Board approved the Mid-Year assurance statement.

### Management Accounts

- 4.5 Carmel noted the key highlights namely the significant cut in DfC funding, confirmation of the additional DfE bid of £2.72m, and recoupment currently sitting at £450,000 of the £500,000 annual target. As always cashflow is heavily weighted to the second half of the year.

### Strategic Resources Committee Update

- 4.6 The Strategic Resources Committee recently approved the Legal Services Business Case which the Board noted.
- 4.7 The Disability Action Plan has been prepared and sets out our targets on a range of diversity issues. The Strategic Resources Committee agreed this document for the Board to endorse which the Board agreed.

## **5.0 Other Committee Updates**

### USBF

- 5.1 Richard Hanna noted the CEO Report and highlighted that the Fund is partnering with RTE for a project with Andrew Trimble around identity and rugby. The programme has an interesting all Ireland perspective and could provide opportunities for further RTE collaboration.

### Investment Committee

- 5.2 Ballywalter has now been released all over Ireland. New Talent Focus film The Sparrow, won the best Irish First Feature at Galway, and Glenarma Tapes was selected for Frightfest in August. New Writer Focus film The Land of Saints and Sinners premiered at the Venice Film Festival in September. Woman in the Wall was a hit on BBC1 and came no.1 in Broadcast ratings for the last week in August with 13.2m people viewing the series, just under 6m on iPlayer. Blue Lights figures are equally as good with 16.8m viewers. Hope St series 3 is in post-production with discussion underway around a Series 4. Series 2 attracted 8.1m. World on Fire Series 2 attracted 13.7m viewers on TV and iPlayer.
- 5.3 The Investment Committee made two new TV drama awards, Dead and Buried from Colin Bateman for BBCNI and Breathtaking scheduled for Autumn on ITV. Tom Jones did well on ITVx and will soon broadcast on ITV. Puffin Rock has done extremely well, Stories of Blossom featured at GamesCom and the developers are receiving industry recognition. The Finish Line is currently airing on BBC1 daily. It has made a good start, with high ratings of 1.13m, a 15.7% share. Lisa Magee is working on a new series which we are helping to develop. Lastly it was great to hear of Afro-Mic's Small Indie of the Year Award success at Edinburgh TV Festival. Credit should also go to Jennifer Johnston, sector lead for fact/ent companies.

### NIHAWG

- 5.4 Francis Jones had a positive meeting with UTV resulting in an extension to the Archive Partnership. Funding has been secured from the BFI for the contemporary collecting process with the Nerve Centre which will help us identify gaps in the collection, enable us to work with community organisations and individuals on how we curate, catalogue and present their content. A draft policy document around guidelines for staff working with sensitive content was circulated to the Board. It was drawn up after staff digitising broadcast news from the 80s found some of it quite graphic and troubling. Safeguards are now in place on how they work with that material. The British Board of Film Classification, BFI, ITV and BBCNI have been contacted for input into this document and any thoughts from the Board would be welcome. The Chair thanked Peter Weil for pushing this piece of work forward.
- 5.5 The Board noted the new guidelines and any comments to be passed to Francis Jones by 3<sup>rd</sup> October.

### Skills/Training

- 5.6 Andrew Reid highlighted the CINE Annual Report noting the success of the first 18 months of the scheme. The Chair reiterated this noting the impressive figures and the need to look at how we shine a light on this success. While we don't know how long CINE will last, we strongly hope it will continue. While the initial funding didn't have a defined period of time, we hope that further funding is agreed before the 3 years have ended. The intention to formally evaluate CINE was noted. It would also be worth exploring the scope to allocate 10x budget to CINE.
- 5.7 Aim High comes to an end in October and will take a break for a year to give time to recruit new trainees and to avoid flooding the market. Accountancy trainees appointed by Universal but unemployed due to the strikes have been picked up by Northern Ireland Screen and redeployed including one within Northern Ireland Screen itself. We now have a team of 7



dedicated skills officers dealing with over 150 trainees. A huge amount of recruitment, pastoral care and planning goes into the management of these trainees.

### CEFFWG

- 5.8 Susan Picken noted the busy film festival period approaching. Two features and 13 shorts are currently on Belfast Film Festival's programme as well as archive events at Foyle and Belfast Film Festivals. Belfast 2024, a large-scale engagement programme that evolved from Belfast's bid for European City of Culture in 2018 is being put together. Belfast Film Festival look set to be involved with a young filmmakers experience led by Mark Cousins.
- 5.9 Susan recommended a number of Pressburger films which will be shown at QFT over the next few months.

### SECWG

- 5.10 David McConnell noted the development of a new programme with NextGen Skills Academy, a new level 3 qualification which commences in September. Local industry is involved providing work experience and work placements. It is hoped this project will extend to other colleges in the Northwest. BBC Microbit began in June and is being offered to all primary schools across the UK. The main issue is ensuring teacher training is maximised by all schools/teachers. David thanked Tom for the connection with Software Alliance after a positive meeting. Into Film's Storybuilder resources will be in print in the next week or two in partnership with BAFTA and the local industry.
- 5.11 In response to a question from Richard Hanna, David noted that we had little capacity to support the teacher training colleagues in relation to digital skills.

### ILBF

- 5.12 The ILBF team attended the launch of Cúla 4, TG4's new standalone children's channel, where they had an opportunity to speak to the Irish Culture Minister about the future of Irish Government funding of ILBF and to hear Alan Esselmont at TG4 celebrate the value and success of TG4's partnership with ILBF.
- 5.13 Children's programming is well represented with two series on the autumn schedule for TG4, The Irish language version of Puffin Rock aired at the IFI Family Festival in Dublin in August and will screen at Cineworld on 19<sup>th</sup> October with the potential for a Derry screening too. General feedback has been very positive. There is a diverse range of programming in various stages of production. The trainee graduation and networking event will take place at Ormeau Baths on 29<sup>th</sup> September. Six nominations received for the Oireachtas communication awards. A radio series presented by 2 former trainees is airing and has been nominated for the Irish podcast awards. A new drama series is going into production in October with 5 trainees attached.

## **6.0 CMS Committee Inquiry Report**

- 6.1 It is our intention to submit to this inquiry which is primarily on tax credits for film and high-end TV and the state of the nation for film production and film exhibition. Input has been received from internal and external stakeholders and it is our intention to put a draft to the Board within the next week to 10 days. This would then need sign off from the Board to meet

the deadline of 18<sup>th</sup> October. Any comments therefore to be passed to the CEO within next 3 weeks.

- 6.2 Tom Gray asked if we were aware of HMRC's aggressive crack down on R&D tax credits? It was agreed this would be picked up offline.

## 7.0 Marketing Calendar

- 7.1 Festival season is approaching. There will be screenings in Belfast of Lie of the Land and The Last Rifleman. Our MIPCOM launch event takes place in October which is our biggest annual corporate event. The Moving Image Awards showcase is confirmed for 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September.

## 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 Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

### Actions

Point	Detail	Actioned by	Update
2.4	Provide additional comments on the Board Effectiveness report to the Chair by Monday 25 <sup>th</sup> September	All Board members	Board Effectiveness Report submitted to DfE
3.3	Ideas welcome for BBC and potential Channel 4 Partnership Agreements	All Board members	Ongoing
4.2	Provide comments on DfE's draft Partnership Agreement to CEO by 26 <sup>th</sup> September	All Board members	Complete
5.5	Provide comments on the Guidelines on Working with Sensitive Material to Francis Jones by 3 <sup>rd</sup> October	All Board members	Complete
6.1	Provide comments on the CMS Committee Inquiry Report to CEO by 10 <sup>th</sup> October	All Board members	CMS Cte Report submitted
6.2	Follow up with Tom Gray on HMRC's recent tax credit crackdown	Andrew Reid	Clarity received on tax issue. Briefing arranged for staff

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

Date: 12/12/23 \_\_\_\_\_