

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 10th December 2024

11am, Tuesday 10th December 2024

Northern Ireland Screen Boardroom ~ Alfred Street, Belfast

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

In attendance: Richard Williams (CEO), Andrew Reid (Chief Content Officer), Áine Walsh (Head of ILBF), Mary McVey (Head of Marketing), Francis Jones (Archive Manager), David McConnell (Head of Education), Bernard McCloskey (Head of Exhibition), Suzanne Harrison (Head of Funding), Marie Shivers (PA to CEO)

Apologies: Mark Huffam, Laura Higgins (Head of Finance), Nicola Lyons (Head of Production)

No conflicts of interest were noted.

1.0 Minutes of the Board meeting of 24th September 2024

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

1.2 All actions have been addressed. No matters arising.

2.0 Chair's business

2.1 The Board recruitment process is progressing with the successful applications with the Minister for approval. Some rotation of committee roles will be made around this new intake of Board members with the Investment Committee first. Peter Weil will step down as chair after the January meeting.

2.2 A final Programme for Government is imminent, as is an indicative draft 2025-26 budget which we have been advised could be issued just after Christmas.

2.3 The March Board meeting will be held at Studio Ulster and either the June or September 2025 meeting will be held in Derry~Londonderry. The Board Effectiveness review will be carried out next Spring.

2.4 Peter Weil noted his thanks to the team for their help and guidance during his time on the Investment Committee. The Chair in turn thanked Peter for his work on the Committee.

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

3.1 The CEO summarised the main highlights notably 7 BIFAs for Kneecap; the recent successful Sustainability and MIPCOM events; and The Death of Robin Hood large-scale project recently awarded at a recent Investment Committee which will film at a number of local locations and includes a Hollywood A list cast.

- 3.2 Belfast Stories will update at the next meeting. The pause in trainee programmes is a sensible step and will be managed accordingly to ensure we don't see any detriment to the future skills programme. Pausing will allow demand to build up and for people to realise its importance.
- 3.3 A substantial amount of work is underway on restructuring of the Archive team, a lengthy process still to be worked through; a Mid-Term evaluation is underway to help facilitate the next strategic planning process, due to be completed by the end of March 2025. A small number of Board members will be contacted for their input early in the new year.

KPI Chart

- 3.4 The CEO presented KPI projections against projects we have committed funding to. The slack in Large-Scale was predominantly picked up in TV Drama, but also in other areas. This is a positive story in terms of spend especially with the Mid-Term Evaluation underway. Carmel Mullan noted that these figures show the diversity of our business which has been helped by the Department allowing us to move money between sectors. There will be fewer big projects as there is a slowdown in the international market and therefore increased competition; TV Drama is also shrinking albeit at a slower rate. The TV Drama NI spend ratio is strong in part due to projects coming through with indigenous talent attached that has been developed through independent film e.g. local directors, writers and producers.
- 3.5 It was noted that the NI spend return figures in each sector are very strong but will this raise an issue going into the next strategy given the higher levels of investment across the sectors outside of Large-Scale if this isn't replicated going forward? Suzanne noted that whilst a strong and viable level of support is required across all sectors, it is Large-Scale that helps the most to deliver the overall return within our budget. The expectation is that Large-Scale will still account for a large element of the next strategy budget in order to deliver the return. All other sectors will however still need strong support and we do not want to increase ratios across the other sectors where possible as it creates too much pressure on them.
- 3.6 It is a balancing act: we don't want other areas to shrink, but we do need another £100m added to the current NI spend figure before the end of strategy and a large part of this will come from Large-Scale projects. The Chair noted that we, as well as the owners, have a key role to play in helping to fill the studios. Whilst we don't get as high a return on TV Drama as we do on Large-Scale, we still do get a strong return on TV Drama, we just need to continue to deliver.
- 3.7 Suzanne Harrison added that the KPIs are in a good position with no current areas of concern. We recently introduced additional sustainability funding and are the first agency to make HVO mandatory on all productions; both language funds are delivering; expect next quarter to have slightly fuller detail once education figures are confirmed.

Investment Report

- 3.8 The Investment Report shows great breadth across all funding. Screen Fund is currently over forecast in terms of cashflow. Lottery is on track with a good response to individual and company calls. Language funds are on track for full spend with a good mix of projects. The Report shows how many projects we are funding and the different companies we engage with.

4.0 Finance, Audit and Governance

Risk Register

- 4.1 The Risk Register was discussed in detail at the recent Committee meeting. Good news is all risks remain the same or have decreased. CINE still sits at the top; a business case has been submitted for critical funding to keep CINE going next year in a lesser but still substantial enough form to allow CINE to be integrated into the new strategy period. It is proposed to integrate CINE into skills to effectively become one department. This will involve some staff changes which will need to be worked out.
- 4.2 The Risk Register was agreed by the Board.

Audit and Risk Committee Update

- 4.3 Carmel noted two policies discussed at the recent meeting - Conflicts of Interest and Health and Safety - both of which had been reviewed and updated and were accepted by the Committee. The Board endorsed the ARC recommendation for these policies.
- 4.4 Due to the large number of policies which need to be reviewed and updated in line with current legislation, the decision was taken to outsource this work and SIB has offered their assistance. The Chair noted that the Strategic Resource Committee had also discussed this and agreed that outsourcing should be undertaken with only the most important policies brought to the Board for endorsement.
- 4.5 Three contracts were awarded that on advice from DfE should have been Direct Award Contracts as there is only one single supplier who can provide those services. The Committee discussed the procurement processes in place and have agreed further measures to ensure proper regulations are followed in the future.
- 4.6 Fionnuala Deane asked if independent companies could use some of the policies as templates when reviewing their own as it would be helpful to access them as a resource, a central repository would be useful for companies to have access to. The CEO will reach out to our Scottish and Welsh counterparts as well as Invest NI to see what they are doing.

Management Accounts

- 4.7 Full expenditure is on track, Screen Fund is positive and the CINE scheme is under review. Recoupment is currently at £300k with a target at £500k for year end. We hope to be able to retain this funding. The Pay award to quarter 1 was backdated and paid. Liability sitting for unpaid contracts but all are allocated or will be allocated in the New Year.
- 4.8 The Board agreed the Management Accounts.

Strategic Resources Committee Update

- 4.9 The Chair noted the ALB Review of NI Screen. The report was better than expected, a broad endorsement of our role and purpose. There was a number of recommendations in the report which don't all fall to us, some of which have already been implemented.

5.0 Marketing Update

- 5.1 We're in the thick of award season. Kneecap continues its award success with 7 BIFAs and is Ireland's entry for the Oscars, 1 of 89 films entered into this category. The Longlist will be published on 17th December with the Shortlist of 5 on 17th January. The Flats is also eligible for entry to the Oscars. Dog Ears have been nominated for a children's award and Blue Lights is nominated for Best drama at the Broadcast Awards.
- 5.2 Two recent Ministerial visits with DfE Minister visiting Dog Ears in Derry~Londonderry and Minister Lyons attending the StoryBuilder event at Bloomfield Collegiate launched by Thaddea Graham. The MIP lunch went very well with good feedback from attendees. There was also a number of positive announcements at Belfast Media Festival in the Fact/Ent sector. The trailer for How to Train Your Dragon has been released with the film scheduled for release on 13th June 2025. We hope to do an event around this.

6.0 Other Committee Updates

- 6.1 The Chair noted Richard Hanna's contribution to the work of the Board and to the USBF over the years and wished him well.

Skills/Training

- 6.2 Skills is busy across all areas with a mix of placements and recruitment but concentrating on developing existing talent as opposed to recruiting this year. As mentioned above we will be bringing the CINE and core skills team together. On target for full budget spend despite a slow start with the Interactive sector. There are currently 28 CINE trainees working in the industry.

Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund (USBF)

- 6.3 The Fund is well on track with a steady flow of production projects underway, both current and returning projects. There will be a further flow of projects into 2025 including a number of BBCNI projects. The team is working with different companies ahead of the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026 to secure interest on the US side. We also hope to get Ministerial involvement around the anniversary celebrations.

NIHAWG

- 6.4 A collaborative project with Belfast City Council and the Belfast Stories team, Storymakers, started life as a history project, recording fascinating stories of individuals about a wide range of subjects. The sold-out launch was held on 21 November and received a good response, and talks are underway for another phase for Belfast Stories. NI Now is a contemporary collection EDI project gathering stories from different community organisations which Belfast City Council are keen to do another version of. After Image launched its second phase: this BECTU/BFI project has been running since the 1980s documenting film, TV, theatre and radio and interviewing key people across the UK and has received a good response so far. Outreach is ongoing, there is huge demand with 17 screenings delivered since the beginning of December.

ILBF

- 6.5 A second series of Crá was awarded funding at the last meeting. The first series has been very popular. The first co-development initiative with the Canada Media Fund aired recently, an Irish contribution to music in the logging areas of Canada. Lots of digital resources for children have completed and are now available online; a number of projects are airing over Christmas; training is going to plan; six nominations received for the Oireachtas media awards in November in Kerry with Kneecap winning best film and Ronin Films winning in the children's category. BFI is hopeful of a 2-year funding deal and we continue discussions with the Irish government for future funding. The scheme run with TG4 for new talent, directors and writers to make shorts picked another 15 projects to go into development next year.

SECWG

- 6.6 Some encouraging conversations have been had with CCEA in terms of resources and digital skills action plan. The Education Minister announced a review of the curriculum and the CLCs are working behind the scenes on this. Moving Image Arts awards recently took place in Derry~Londonderry and Belfast with both very well attended. Into Film's new Ambassadors are Thaddea Graham and Jamie Dornan. The ScreenWorks and BBC Microbit programmes are running very well. CLCs are doing a lot of teacher training as BBC assistance comes to an end, and capital funding requirements within schools are becoming more and more evident.

Investment Committee

- 6.7 A good range of projects recently awarded by the Committee: Finish Line series 3, Mastermind series 23/24, Blue Lights series 3 and Titanic Sinks Tonight which will be the first project to utilise Studio Ulster. The Death of Robin Hood project was also agreed with Hugh Jackman and Jodie Comer attached. Crookhaven, a children's series for CBBC, was also awarded which has potential to be a returning series.

CEFFWG

- 6.8 Belfast Stories will feature at the next meeting with a full update as there are a lot of moving parts happening at the moment. The public consultation is now open until 23rd February 2025. Marie will circulate the link to Board members for circulation more widely. Susan encouraged everyone to look at this and feedback any comments. Festival season has come to a close with all events very well attended.

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 scheduled for 11am on Tuesday 18th March 2025.

Actions

Point	Detail	Actioned by	Update
4.6	The CEO will reach out to our Scottish and Welsh counterparts and Invest NI to see what they are doing to access policies	CEO	Useful responses received
6.8	Circulate the Belfast Stories consultation link to Board members for further circulation	MLS	Circulated

Signed: _____



Date: _____

18/3/25