

NATIONAL FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS HELD ON TUESDAY 21ST FEBRUARY 2023 AT NFTS BEACONSFIELD.

Present:

Sophie Turner Laing (Chair), Ian Lewis (Deputy Chair), Joe Bradbury-Walters, Geoffrey Crossick, Patrick Fuller, Sara Geater, Max Pederson, Caroline Hollick, Oli Hyatt, Andrew Macdonald, Pukar Mehta, Laurent Samama, Bal Samra, Mary Stiasny, Jon Wardle, and Hilary Strong by Zoom.

Apologies: Phil Edgar-Jones, Ollie Madden, Charlotte Moore, Adil Ray, Sue Vertue, Miranda Wayland.

In attendance: Gillian Carr, Trevor Hall, Mark Readman, Eleanor Wheal.

Clerk: Chris Wensley

Declaration of Personal Interests: None declared.

- The Chair welcomed Max Pederson attending his first meeting as the Student Governor.
- The Board approved the appointment to the Board and to the Audit Committee of Scott Forrest, Chief Commercial Officer at Electronic Arts.

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

1.1 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the previous Board of Governors Meeting held on 22nd November 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

1.2 Actions

It was noted that all actions had been completed or were on the agenda for the meeting.

1.3 Matters Arising.

There were none.

2. Reports and Updates.

2.1 Student Union Report

Max Pedersen advised that it was his intention to continue the initiatives to create spaces for students to share ideas and to express their voice to the School.

He reported a range of activities that the SU had organised or supported, and outlined a series of events that were planned for the next few months.

In answer to a question, he invited Board members to facilitate visits to the SU of their colleagues with disabilities as this was an SU priority.

Mary Stiasny suggested the SU should establish links with other student unions, especially those in small specialist HEIs, to share experiences.

The Board thanked Max for his report.

2.2 Director's Report

The Director reported on his activities since November 2022. He drew particular attention to the important CoStar application, and the BFI Clusters initiative.

He also reported on key partner funding agreement renewals; student recruitment; a new sponsorship opportunity; and progress with arrangements for the 2023 Gala.

2.3 Finance Director's Report

Trevor Hall updated the Committee on the financial performance since the last meeting, and confirmed that the School was performing better than budget. He also outlined the current position with bank loans and investments, and advised that recruitment numbers were in line with target. Looking forward, he identified as priorities implementing the new corporate plan into the budget, and settling the School's current bank loan.

2.4 Creative Industries Liaison Group

Jon Wardle on behalf of Sue Vertue reported that the first meeting of the group had taken place, with the main items for discussion being what industry looked for in graduates; the learning outcomes of School courses; and strategies for bridging the gap between the School and employment.

There was discussion about how best to develop students' creative leadership qualities, and Sara Geater suggested hosting a meeting of creative industry talent managers at the School.

2.5 Minutes from F&GP Committee

Ian Lewis presented the minutes of the meeting held on 7th February 2023. He advised that most items discussed were on the Board agenda, but noted that the Committee had discussed the role and function of the NFTS Foundation. The Chair advised that she intended to invite the Chair of the Foundation to attend Board meetings as an observer.

2.6 Minutes from Audit Committee

Sara Geater presented the minutes of the meeting held on 14th February 2023. She drew attention to recent very positive internal audits, and also a discussion about how the School could best implement the 'Can't Buy my Silence' initiative.

Mary Stiasny and Geoff Crossick proposed that the School should investigate joining Universities UK, where advice on such matters would be available.

2.7 Notes from Ethics Advisory Group (EAG).

Geoff Crossick advised that the EAG had been asked to review the operation of the NEOM Saudi Arabia contract with the NFTS.

The Group had concluded that the experience of the first two years of the contract did not raise any new ethical issues to be considered and it considered that the experience of operating the courses for two years had been broadly positive.

It therefore recommended that, as far as ethical dimensions were concerned, the contract could be renewed for 2024 if requested by NEOM, subject to the School continuing to select appropriate students and to ensure a suitable gender balance.

2.8 Annual Inclusion & Diversity Report – students

Eleanor Wheal presented data showing the demographics of the 2022 student intake for Masters, full time Diploma courses and Certificate courses, together with trends across the last three years in respect of ethnicity, gender, disability status and socio-economic background.

The data showed:

- ethnic diversity - above KPI for Master's students but below the sector average for Diploma courses;
- female representation across the Masters and Diploma courses had reduced on both Master's and Diploma courses but this was in line with previous years' fluctuations;
- disability - exceeded the industry target and the national average;
- socio-economic background – below the target for MA and Diploma students but some progress with Diploma students.

The Board discussed the report in detail, with particular attention to the recruitment of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. It was noted that significant disincentives were the fact that School courses were all post graduate, implying more debt and a delay entering paid work, as well as the current high cost of living. Among suggestions for Management to consider were:

- interviewing students from low socio-economic backgrounds about their experiences at the School, as well as those who had declined offers to determine their reasons;
- offering free places on short courses for targeted students;
- working more closely with HEIs with good undergraduate statistics in this area;
- continuing the developments with degree apprenticeships and students sponsored by industry.

2.9 Annual Inclusion & Diversity Report – staff

Gillian Carr presented the annual report on staff diversity and inclusion, the data from which remained similar to previous years.

She also outlined an action plan to help improve the recruitment and support of diverse talent, particularly to better anticipate their requirements in the workplace, using the TV Access Project's '5As' standards: anticipate; ask; assess; adjust; advocate.

Board members offered to help with recruitment of staff in specific areas by disseminating opportunities at the School, and also by encouraging specific candidates to apply.

2.10 Curriculum and Short Course Report

Mark Readman updated the Board on key curriculum activity since the last meeting, including updates on short courses, the operation of the full-time curriculum, development of new courses, academic standards, complaints and appeals, partnerships and recruitment. He drew particular attention to increased activity in short courses and the national and regional hubs, and the action plan developed after the School's six-year Periodic Review of its MA courses.

There was discussion about the impact of AI on School courses, both in terms of staff expertise to teach and research in this area, but also on student assignments and assessment.

2.11 Implications of receiving Degree-Awarding Powers

Eleanor Wheal described the opportunities that securing degree-awarding powers presented to the School.

These included

- Recruitment
Only HEIs with degree-awarding powers could sponsor overseas students on diploma courses.
- Approval of new MA courses
The NFTS would now be able to design and approve new degree courses up to and including Master's level in approved subjects.
- Changes to existing MA courses
The School would be able more easily to implement changes to the content, mode of delivery, assessment and duration of its MA courses.
- Degree Apprenticeships
Only HEIs with degree awarding powers could be involved in the delivery of degree apprenticeships.

3. Strategy and Discussion.

3.1 Corporate Plan 2028

Jon Wardle presented the latest draft of the new Corporate Plan. He explained that the intention was to evolve and build upon existing strengths, and he described how the School could grow over the next five years in six key areas: hub development, new courses, R&D, apprenticeships, student support and alumni.

The Board made several suggestions concerning presentation and highlights, including:

- foreground the work in thought leadership and research;
- highlight those aspects of the plan that encourage diversity;
- clarify that hub development will be deeper initially, and then wider;
- improve the collection and presentation of data.

There was also discussion about the national/international impact of the School, and it was agreed that the focus should be on the School's work and reputation in the UK, but with a global impact.

It was agreed that Management should continue to develop the Plan, and bring a new draft to the June meeting for approval.

3.2 Corporate Plan 2028 Draft Financial Forecast

Trevor Hall updated members on the financial forecast for the ambitions set out in the draft Corporate Plan 2028, and he presented models of the potential costs and benefits of the six ambitions described above.

It was noted that several aspects of the Plan and its budget were inter-linked, namely research, OfS funding, new courses and NFTS Beaconsfield development.

RESOLVED: That Management could proceed with the recruitment and appointment of the small number of new roles agreed at the meeting.

3.3 Update on Beaconsfield Campus.

Jon Wardle outlined recent developments with the project to develop the NFTS Beaconsfield estate.

There was discussion about costs, benefits and risks, as well as other options which should be considered. The Board was broadly supportive of the proposed next steps.

4. Any Other Business

There was none.

5. Date of Next Meeting:

This was confirmed as Tuesday 20th June 2023 at 10.30am at the NFTS, Beaconsfield.

6. Board Briefing

Max Pedersen, SU President, Solveig Herzum and Eloise Jenninger, SU Reps, described the work of the student group the Green Collective in progressing the School's sustainability ambitions, and they also outlined forthcoming initiatives that were planned.

The Board thanked them for a very interesting presentation, and the Chair suggested they should liaise with international film schools to exchange ideas. The Director offered to introduce them to a number of Film Schools in Europe and US.