

NATIONAL FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS HELD ON TUESDAY 25th FEBRUARY 2025 AT NFTS BEACONSFIELD.

Sophie Turner Laing (Chair), Paloma Baeza, Chris Bird, Angus Blair, Paul Clark, Polly Cochrane, Geoffrey Crossick, Cécile Frot-Coutaz, Andy Harries, John Lee, Pukar Mehta, Laurent Samama, Caroline Silver, Hilary Strong and Jon Wardle.

In attendance: Stephen Louis, Sue Vertue, Ijeoma Akigwe, Gillian Carr, Trevor Hall, Mark Readman and Eleanor Wheal.

Minutes: Alex Rose.

Apologies: Julian Bellamy, Scott Forrest, Patrick Fuller, Andrew Macdonald, Ollie Madden, Charlotte Moore and Adil Ray.

Declaration of Personal Interests: There were no new declarations.

Introduction

The Board conveyed their deepest condolences to the family and friends of Chris Wensley, the former Clerk who passed away in January 2025

Angus Blair was welcomed to his first Board of Governors Meeting following his election as Student Union President.

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

1.1 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the previous Board of Governors Meeting held on 5th December 2024 were approved as an accurate record.

1.2 Actions

1.2.1 Management to present a review of scholarship strategy.

This was dealt with under 2.3.

1.2.2 GAR to discuss how to ensure excellence in the craft of film and TV is appropriately recognized in the award of NFTS Fellow.

This had been carried forward to the June meeting, following the next GAR Committee meeting.

It was noted that all other actions had been completed.

1.3 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

2. Strategy

2.1 Update on Expanding Beaconsfield Studios inc Fundraising

Jon Wardle provided an update about ongoing negotiations to develop the NFTS Beaconsfield campus, including confirmation of initial government funding, the contract to purchase the building and the building specification. He described progress with the associated fundraising, and explained the targets, deadlines and next steps.

The Board discussed fundraising and the importance of members engaging with their network of key potential industry funders and High Net Worth Individuals. The Board noted the paper.

2.2 Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Update

Mark Readman presented the proposal to develop the curriculum, re-validating the existing two-year MA qualification as a Master of Fine Arts (MFA), and the Postgraduate Diploma qualification as a one-year MA. Following consultation with key stakeholders including a survey of MA applicants and ongoing research by HESA/JISC, it was proposed to revise and re-validate the curriculum and academic qualifications offered for the School's full-time postgraduate courses to better reflect the nature of existing courses, to make them more compelling in the market, and to create new opportunities for students on one-year courses, both home and international. The financial forecast of the proposals was also presented.

The Board discussed the proposal and agreed with the potential benefits for both students and the School.

RESOLVED: To approve the revalidation process for subsequent reporting to the Board of Governors.

2.3 Update on Scholarship and Student Funding Strategy

Jon Wardle provided an update, including the development of two primary objectives relating to attracting the highest quality British applicants, and growing the Scholarship Fund, along with a secondary objective relating to trialling talent-based scholarships for international students.

The methods for achieving these objectives were presented and explained. The Board discussed the potential role of development staff in coordinating the gathering of funds for these purposes.

The Board noted the paper.

3. Updates from Committees

3.1 Minutes from F&GP Committee.

Laurent Samama presented the minutes of the meeting held on 11th February 2025.

3.2 Minutes from Audit Committee.

Caroline Silver presented the minutes of the meeting held on 11th February 2025. It was suggested that the Board review the updated, more agile Business Continuity Plan created by Trevor Hall.

ACTION: Trevor Hall to present the updated Business Continuity Plan to the next meeting of the Board of Governors.

4. Reports

4.1 Director's Report

Jon Wardle noted the School's recent success at the BAFTA Awards, with "Rock, Paper, Scissors" winning the British Short Film award and NFTS Graduates winning both animation awards.

The Director noted that Ofsted completed a highly successful New Provider Monitoring Visit in February 2025. The School received the highest grade of "significant progress" in two of the three evaluated areas, with the third graded as "reasonable progress". The Board thanked Eleanor Wheal and her team for their work.

The Graduate Showcase was taking place in the week commencing 3rd March 2025, with increased ticket demand resulting in over 2500 attendees expected across the four-day event. It was confirmed that Louis Theroux would be awarded an Honorary Fellowship at the Graduation Ceremony on Friday 7th March 2025.

Preparations are underway for the Gala, scheduled for June 2025, with the event raising significant funds for scholarships and bursaries.

The Director also reported on progress made to date towards achieving the School's vision, objectives and goals for the year 2024/25.

4.2 Finance Director's Report

Trevor Hall updated the Committee on the School's financial performance for the five months to 31st December 2024, which were marginally behind budget. A financial forecast until July 2025 was provided, which is projected to be behind budget. Trevor Hall confirmed that Management are exploring a number of opportunities to close the gap.

The School had renegotiated its energy contracts to save money going forward. The Board noted the financial performance.

4.3 Student Union Report

Angus Blair thanked the previous SU President, Eloise Jenner, for her work. Meetings were currently taking place with the Student Action Group to arrange screenings to facilitate discussion about particular issues. The SU was creating more intimate events for 2025, along with plans for more alumni mixers.

The Student Union President stated that he would be holding termly open forums to gather informal feedback on the student experience, with key points conveyed in this Board report going forward.

The Board noted the Student Union report.

4.4 Curriculum and Short Course Report

Mark Readman stated that following final assessments for all MA students in December and January, final grades were discussed and ultimately confirmed by the Final Examination Board on 11th February 2025. An appropriate range of marks was noted across the cohort.

Updates were provided to the Board on key curriculum activity since the last meeting, including publication of the School's AI Principles to new students, updates on short courses, and activity in the Hubs. The upcoming completion of the first intake of the Sean Connery Talent Lab was noted, with applications for the second intake having increased significantly.

The Board noted the Curriculum and Short Course report.

4.5 Apprenticeships Update (inc Safeguarding)

Eleanor Wheal reported that the School's apprenticeship programmes were progressing well. Diversity statistics were presented following the commencement of the 2025 intake of the Level 4 Junior Production Coordinators Apprenticeship. No safeguarding concerns were reported.

It was noted that the next Ofsted inspection would be in a minimum of 18 months.

The Board noted the report.

4.6 Annual Diversity Report - Students

Eleanor Wheal reported that the percentage of ethnically diverse UK domiciled entrants on MA courses decreased slightly in 2024, whilst female representation had notably increased. The School exceeded the industry standard and national average of students declaring a disability. The percentage of students from low socio-economic backgrounds had remained relatively static, with work continuing to encourage applicants from these backgrounds.

The Board noted the report.

4.7 Annual Diversity Report – Staff (inc Anti-Discrimination Group Update)

Gillian Carr reported staff diversity and inclusion, stating that the target for the ethnic diversity of visiting tutors had been increased for 2025. A significantly higher percentage of ethnically diverse new appointments had been made in 2024, whilst there had also been a small increase in those reporting a disability.

Eleanor Wheal praised the work of Hamish Thompson, the Disability Advocate, on helping students develop Access Riders which they could use in the workplace after they leave the School.

The Board noted the report.

5. Date of Next Meeting:

The next Board of Governors meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 24th June 2025 at 10.30am at the NFTS, Beaconsfield.

The Chair confirmed that a Strategy Away Day was planned for October 2025.

6. Board Briefing – *CoSTAR Update from Becky Gregory-Clarke and Miles Bernie*

Becky Gregory-Clarke and Miles Bernie provided an update on CoSTAR, explaining the relevant timelines for 2025 onwards and providing examples of completed and ongoing work with developing technologies, including generative AI, and a short animated film created using new Gaussian Splatt technology. The role of students and industry in future projects was discussed, with the desire for potential meetings with studio Heads of Production for their input on areas of sector interest.

The Board thanked them for a very interesting presentation.