

NATIONAL FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS HELD ON TUESDAY 23rd MARCH 2021 BY VIDEOCONFERENCE.

Present: Patrick McKenna (Chair), Stephen Louis (Deputy Chair), Joe Bradbury-Walters, Geoffrey Crossick, Phil Edgar-Jones, Patrick Fuller, Rose Garnett, Danielle Goff, Oli Hyatt, Ian Lewis, Andrew Macdonald, Pukar Mehta, Steve Mertz, Adil Ray (until 11.30), Siobhan Reddy, Laurent Samama, Bal Samra, Sue Vertue, Jon Wardle (Director).

In attendance: Trevor Hall (FD), Kate Renwick (Director of HR), Eleanor Wheal (Registrar).
Chris Wensley (Clerk).

Apologies: Caroline Hollick, Sara Geater, Mary Stiasny, Colin Young.

Declaration of Personal Interests: Trevor Hall declared that he was a Pension Trustee (Item 3.2).

The Chair welcomed Rose Garnett and Danielle Goff, the SU President to their first meeting.

The meeting was observed by an assessor from the QAA reviewing the School's application for degree-awarding powers.

1. Board Briefing.

The meeting opened with a presentation from Becky Gregory-Clarke, Head of Immersive. She explained the structure, philosophy and ambition of the Centre, and showed examples of the work produced.

The Board discussed the implications of virtual production for the creative industries and for training, and thanked Becky for a stimulating presentation.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

2.1 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the previous Board of Governors Meeting held on 24th November 2020 were approved as an accurate record.

2.2 Actions

2.2.1 The Executive to produce a paper for the next meeting demonstrating how the NFTS conforms with the OfS Conditions of Registration.

Eleanor Wheal presented a mapping document demonstrating how the Board could be assured that the School's complied with the OfS Conditions of Registration.

Mary Stiasny had suggested in notes to the Clerk that the Freedom of Information Publication Scheme (C2) be reviewed by Audit Committee annually, and that there also should be an annual review of NFTS compliance with OfS Conditions of Registration (E2).

Geoff Crossick proposed that the Public Interest Governance Principles for HE (E1) be considered each year alongside the review of the Board's terms of reference.

Pukar Mehta asked how the School ensured that a non-standard entrant to a course was equipped to complete the course successfully (B2). Jon Wardle explained that there was a very rigorous interview process which ensured there were very few students dropping out of courses.

ACTIONS:

- **Eleanor Wheal to discuss with the Chair of Audit an annual review of the Freedom of Information Publication Scheme.**

- **The Board to receive an annual report on compliance with the OfS Conditions of Registration.**
- **Chris Wensley to ensure that the Public Interest Governance Principles for HE are considered each year alongside the review of the Board's terms of reference.**

2.3 Matters Arising.

There were none.

3. Context Setting and Updates.

3.1 Director's Report

The Director reported on his activities since the end of September. With regard to the Covid pandemic, he advised of the steps the School had taken and explained that for start of the Spring Term the School had moved all teaching online with only limited access to the School site for a small group of students who were unable to work from home, but that normal campus tuition for many practical courses had re-started on 8th March. There had also been several Q&A online sessions with students, and other online events. All assessment of final year student work had been completed in time for the Final Exam Board on 5 March, and all students due to graduate had been able to do so with a complete portfolio of work. He thanked his colleagues for all their help and support during the crisis, and industry partners for their support with work experience during the pandemic.

The Graduation Ceremony had been moved to 24 May 2021, with the Graduate Showcase taking place over four days at BFI Southbank from 25-29 May, and additional support offered to graduating students, including continued access to online Masterclasses and student wellbeing support, and a bespoke package of sessions focused on helping students transition into work.

Other than the coronavirus crisis, the Director also advised that student recruitment was very healthy and on target, that the BFI had agreed to replace the ScreenSkills funding, and that recruitment was underway for the Head of the NFTS Wales hub. Finally, with regard to fund-raising, he proposed that the 50th Anniversary Fundraising Gala should take place at Old Billingsgate on the 7th September, and that plans were being developed for a Film and Television Quiz to take place online in January 2022.

In answer to a question from Steve Louis, Danielle Goff thanked the School for enabling all students to complete their courses, and for maintaining high quality online masterclasses despite Covid. Joe Bradbury-Walters also felt that most staff had been pleased with the way the School had responded to the crisis, and the manner in which teaching had been maintained.

Bal Samra asked about an event to celebrate a return to semi-normality, and Jon Wardle advised of a planned staff/student evening event.

The Board discussed the proposed September Gala, and supported continuing planning, but with careful consideration of cancellation penalties and the implications of a possible socially-distanced event.

ACTION: Management to continue the planning for the September Gala, and to report progress to the Board by email and also to the June meeting.

3.2 Finance Director's Report

Trevor Hall updated the Board on the School's financial performance for the six months to January 2021 which was better than budget, in part because of good recruitment to the 2021 cohort, offset somewhat by reduced activity in the hubs. He explained that the pandemic was still making forecasting for the 2020/21 financial year challenging, but that School remained on track to meet its budget surplus for 2020/21.

Finally, he added that the School had proposed to the Pension Trustees a further increase in payments in order to close the deficit on the School's closed defined benefits pension scheme by 2029, to which the Pension Trustees had agreed.

RESOLVED: To approve the proposed increase in payments to close the deficit on the School's closed defined benefits pension scheme by 2029.

3.3 Student Union Report

Danielle Goff reported on a variety of SU actions undertaken to support students, including a housing/tenancy guidance group and a new initiative for developing new clubs and societies, designed particularly to support new students. The SU was also collaborating with NFTS marketing and outreach colleagues to support connections with diverse institutions, and working to advance the Black Society, set up during Black History Month. She added that students were pleased to be learning in person again.

Geoff Crossick advised caution when offering housing and tenancy advice, because of the legal implications.

In answer to a question from Steve Louis, Danielle Goff advised that the job situation for graduating students was better than last year, but not at normal levels.

Sue Vertue suggested that the School liaise with ongoing industry productions, some of which had crewing difficulties.

The Board thanked Danielle for her report.

4. Strategy and Governance.

4.1 Degree-Awarding Powers Update.

Eleanor Wheal updated the Committee on the NFTS application for degree-awarding powers, and described the schedule for meetings and the final report, as well as providing details of the team of assessors.

The Board noted the report.

5. Committee Reports

5.1 Minutes from F&GP Committee

Ian Lewis presented the minutes of the meeting held on 10th March 2021.

He reported that most items discussed were on the Board agenda, but advised of two changes of membership of the Committee, and the appointment of a new NFTS external Health and Safety auditor.

The Board noted the minutes.

5.2 Minutes from Audit Committee

In the absence of Sara Geater, Patrick Fuller presented the minutes of the meeting held on 9th March 2021.

He reported that in addition to items also on the Board agenda, the Committee had

- closely monitored the risks to the NFTS of the Covid epidemic, and had been pleased with the robust and effective manner in which the School had addressed these;
- received a report on Cyber Security, which he was pleased to report was satisfactory;
- started the process to appoint an Internal Auditor since the current contract was ending.

Steve Mertz asked about the Covid Relief Fund, and Jon Wardle assured the Board that there were sufficient funds to address demand until the end of July and that future provision would be made in the next budget as necessary.

The Board noted the minutes.

5.3 Report from GAR Committee

Steve Louis reported that the Committee had discussed Board and Committee diversity and recommended various new appointments. It had also considered the

balance of face-to-face and online meetings for the Board and its committees, and was, for example, considering two Board meetings F2F (June and September) and two online (November and March).

The Board noted the minutes.

RESOLVED: To approve the appointment of Ian Lewis and Sara Geater, as the Chairs of F&GP and Audit, to the GAR Committee.

6. Operational Matters

6.1 Socio-economic data review

Eleanor Wheal presented preliminary data regarding student socio-economic background, and proposed a new recruitment target in this area.

She explained that new metrics for the determination of students' and applicants' socio-economic background were now in use, as approved by the Board.

The new measures, which focussed on parental occupation and type of secondary school attended replaced the current POLAR data system and were recommended by the Sutton Trust and the Social Mobility Commission.

She proposed that the School had adopted the following targets to be achieved by 2023: lower socio-economic: 20% and non-fee-paying school: 93%.

To achieve this, the School would

- make use of the socio-economic data supplied by applicants when awarding scholarships and bursaries;
- review its marketing and outreach plans to ensure that it reaches and connects with applicants from all backgrounds and UK regions;
- address barriers to entry, including the current level of the application fee.

Pukar Mehta asked about the student response rate, and Eleanor Wheal advised that it had been 70% from new students, but less good from existing students.

Geoff Crossick thought a two-year timeframe to achieve ambitious targets was too short, but Jon Wardle said that the School felt it had new initiatives in place to drive this, including an increased scholarship fund.

Bal Samra felt that UK-only data should be provided as well as the overall student data, and also recommended liaising with industry colleagues seeking change in this area.

Danielle Goff considered that the questions asked were not granular enough to differentiate backgrounds, but Jon Wardle replied that the School had to work with the Social Mobility Commission questions. She also reported that there were different criteria for the award of scholarships according to course discipline. In response, Jon Wardle explained that a small number of funders required their scholarships to target excellence, not diversity.

The Board noted the paper.

6.2 2021-22 Student Fees Proposal

Jon Wardle advised of a proposed change to the UK and overseas fees for students on MA courses starting in January 2022.

He explained that, now that the UK had left the EU, all EU students were deemed 'overseas' and liable to pay a higher tuition fee on MA courses.

It had been proposed that the School take the opportunity to review all MA fees to ensure that they remained affordable and the School accessible, whilst still maintaining its income and surpluses, and consequently an advisory group of F&GP and Board members had met to consider this.

As a result, it was proposed that the fee for UK students remained frozen for another year, but that the overseas student fee could be reduced somewhat from its current level, although this would still mean an increase for EU students when compared to current EU fees.

Furthermore, it was proposed to reduce the application fee by more than half, and to find additional funding from the fee changes for bursaries and scholarships.

RESOLVED: To approve the proposed changes to student fees.

6.3 Inclusion & Diversity Report

Kate Renwick presented the annual report on staff Inclusion and Diversity which included a summary of the initiatives carried out at the School in the past year, and data relating to the staff body as a whole, visiting tutors and recruitment.

The data showed small incremental improvements in most measures, and she was pleased to report that a large majority of staff agreed that 'Diversity and Inclusion was valued at the NFTS'.

She advised that future plans included a continuing focus on gender and ethnicity monitoring for visiting tutors, targeted training and development, and inclusive recruitment, as well as supporting Heads of Departments as they worked to increase the diversity of their visiting tutors.

Adil Ray reported on the very positive initiatives from a working party of School colleagues and professionals from the industry which had a brief to amend and update the plans and actions to ensure they remained relevant and fit for purpose. The Board noted the positive changes in visiting tutor diversity, and discussed the longer-term process for achieving better diversity of full-time staff.

The Board welcomed the progress made, and asked management to continue their focus on improvements in this area.

6.4 Curriculum and Short Course Report

Jon Wardle updated the Board on key curriculum activity since the last meeting, including summary information about short courses and the operation of the full-time curriculum.

He advised that the annual student survey had revealed very high levels of satisfaction regarding the School's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that students were very satisfied with their experience at the School, often with increasing levels of satisfaction when compared with previous years.

He also reported on the delivery of short courses, developments at national and regional hubs, the deliberations of the Academic Standards Committee, and complaints and appeals.

The Committee congratulated the School on the very positive student survey results achieved despite the Covid crisis.

6.5 Compliance with Consumer Law review

Eleanor Wheal presented a review designed to assure the Board of the School's compliance with consumer law.

She explained that the Office for Students had asked all HEIs to review their compliance with consumer law with particular reference to changes that had needed to be made to teaching and assessment because of the Covid pandemic, and to ensure that what had been promised to students had been delivered. It was noted that opportunities for work experience and attendance at external events had been difficult, but that efforts were continuing in these areas.

After discussion, the Board was content with the review's conclusion that during the planning of its response to the pandemic the School had given due regard to consumer law, and had delivered all aspects of the curriculum.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 Pinewood and Beaconsfield Campus Update

Jon Wardle reported on progress with the proposed new Education/Skills Hub at Pinewood, and plans to extend the Beaconsfield campus.

7.2 NFTS Staff and Covid

Steve Louis proposed a formal vote of thanks to the staff at the NFTS for the exemplary manner in which they had coped with the Covid crisis.
This was unanimously agreed, and Patrick McKenna agreed to write to all staff.

8. Date of Next Meeting: This was confirmed as Tuesday 22nd June 2021 at 09.30.