

NATIONAL FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS HELD ON TUESDAY 22nd MARCH 2022 AT THE NFTS.

Present: Patrick McKenna (Chair), Ian Lewis (Deputy Chair), Joe Bradbury-Walters, Geoffrey Crossick, Phil Edgar-Jones, Patrick Fuller, Leo Meade, Pukar Mehta, Laurent Samama, Bal Samra, Hilary Strong, Sue Vertue, Jon Wardle (Director).

In attendance: Gillian Carr (HR Director), Trevor Hall (FD), Eleanor Wheal (Registrar), Chris Wensley (Clerk).

Apologies: Rose Garnett, Sara Geater, Caroline Hollick, Oli Hyatt, Andrew Macdonald, Adil Ray, Mary Stiasny.

Declaration of Personal Interests: None declared.

The Chair welcomed Leo Meade, attending his first meeting as the Student Governor.

Board Briefing.

The meeting opened with a presentation by James Aston, National Head of Education at BDO, entitled An HEI Update for Governors - Meeting the challenge.
The Board thanked James for a very useful and interesting presentation.

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

1.1 Minutes of the Last Meeting

It was noted that Bal Samra had reported GAR discussions, not Ian Lewis (Item 5.3)
The minutes of the previous Board of Governors Meeting held on 23rd November 2021 were then approved as an accurate record.

1.2 Actions

It was noted that all actions were dealt with elsewhere in the agenda.

1.3 Matters Arising.

There were none.

2. Context Setting and Updates.

2.1 Director's Report

The Director reported on his activities since 1st November.

With reference to student recruitment for the January 2022 intake, he pointed out that recruitment had slightly exceeded target and that the School had successfully launched the new Virtual Production Certificate course delivered in partnership with WarnerMedia.

He also reported that:

- Disney was the course partner for the new Production Accounting Diploma, providing scholarships and student work experience.
- Graduation Films had been selected for Sundance and HotDocs, and student work has won prizes at the Grierson Awards, Jackson Hole and Berlin, with two of the Graduation Animation films nominated for a BAFTA;
- A new Director of Curriculum had been appointed;
- The 2022 Graduate Showcase had taken place at the BFI Southbank over four days and the Graduation Ceremony at the Odeon Leicester Square;

- Key partner sponsors including DCMS, BFI and UKCA had renewed their grants, and Amazon were also now a sponsor, with the intention of developing a range of skills activities with the School;
- The 2022 Gala would take place on the 21st June at Old Billingsgate.

The Board noted the report.

2.2 Finance Director's Report

Trevor Hall updated the Board on the School's financial performance since the last meeting which was slightly behind budget, due primarily to the surge in energy prices at the turn of the year. The School fixed its supply price in January for the remainder of the budget year, providing protection against current inflated energy prices arising due to the conflict in the Ukraine.

He explained that the School remained on track to make a budget surplus for 2021/22, but that this was likely to be slightly below target, as highlighted above. He also advised that the School had been advised by its brokers that it was eligible to make an insurance claim for losses caused by Covid, and that he was gathering evidence of losses to support the claim.

He reported that the School had been advised that its current loan provider - Allied Irish Bank (AIB) – was exiting the UK market, with the loan balance transferred to Allica Bank until the end of the loan period in 2024.

He explained that any changes to the School banking arrangements must be approved by the Board and noted in the Board minutes. He advised that the School had been approached by Barclays Plc, a leading provider in the HE sector, offering their services.

He recommended the appointment of Barclays as this would provide the School with further options should it wish to raise new debt or wish to place any excess cash on deposit.

After discussion, the Board noted the report.

RESOLVED: To approve the changes to the School's banking arrangements.

2.3 Student Union Report

Leto Meade reported on student social events, both recent and planned, including fundraising events for Ukraine, and diversity awareness sessions, sometimes celebrated through cultural events. He also advised that the SU was fully involved with the efforts to reduce emissions across the School by 20% by 2025.

The Board thanked Leto for his report.

2.4 Anti-racism group update

Jon Wardle reported on the meetings of the industry group set up to try to address the inequalities and disadvantages experienced by many black and ethnically diverse members of the School's community, and the progress made with the commitments, actions and targets from the School's plan. These included commitments to:

- Double the number of ethnically-diverse teachers and increase the diversity of staff;
- Treat student diversity targets as a minimum, not a maximum;
- Increase access through the Outreach programme;
- De-colonise the curriculum;
- Deliver more diversity training for students and staff;
- Analyse and address power inequalities;
- Create a safe space for student voices;
- Offer personalised support to black and ethnically diverse graduates.

Geoffrey Crossick suggested that the report should now focus more upon outcomes rather than processes, and that there should be greater emphasis upon granularity when measuring ethnic diversity.

Sue Vertue and others stressed that diversity ambitions must also include students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Joe Bradbury-Walters advised that Access NFTS was already working with various educational institutions to increase applicants from these backgrounds.

The Board noted the report, and agreed that the paper should be published on the School's website.

2.5 OfS Institution Specific Funding Update

Jon Wardle provided an update on the application process for renewal of the OfS World-Leading Specialist Provider Funding, formerly Institution Specific Funding. He explained that this was aimed at specialist providers and was additional funding provided on a competitive basis to recognise the higher cost and distinctive nature of small specialist higher education providers, and the public value that they bring to the sector.

In 2015 the NFTS had been one of just sixteen HEIs across the UK that made a successful application.

He advised that the School was preparing a new application for funding in the latest round.

3. Strategy and Governance.

3.1 Degree-Awarding Powers Update

Eleanor Wheal updated the Board on the School's application for degree-awarding powers. She advised that the School was re-submitting its application to the OfS, amended for single subject DAPs, and that a decision was expected by September. The Board discussed the process and the revised application in detail, and offered suggestions for its fine-tuning.

3.2 Proposed Changes to B3 OfS Condition of Registration

Eleanor Wheal advised the Board on proposed changes to the OfS's approach to regulating student outcomes (Condition B3 of the Conditions of Registration).

She explained that the OfS was consulting on a new approach in order to:

- protect students from providers and courses in which performance falls below minimum requirements;
- protect taxpayers' money by ensuring that student support funding and OfS public grant funding are not given to providers whose students are unlikely to complete their course or achieve positive outcomes;
- maintain public confidence in the performance of individual providers and the higher education sector in England more generally.

She added that the numerical thresholds for continuation rates, completion rates and progression to managerial/professional employment for full time postgraduate courses were: Continuation 80%; Completion 80%; and Progression 70%.

The School's rates comfortably exceeded these thresholds: Continuation 99%; Completion 97.4%; and Progression 93.6%.

The Board noted the report.

4. Committee Reports

4.1 Minutes from F&GP Committee

Ian Lewis presented the minutes of the meetings held on January 11th and March 9th 2022.

He reported that all the Committee's discussions and actions were reported elsewhere on that day's Board agenda.

Geoffrey Crossick asked about the TRAC return showing that 'recovery of full economic costs on non-public funded tuition (NPFT) was less than 100% and recovery of full economic costs on Other Income Generating Activity was less than 100%'. Trevor Hall explained that non-public funded tuition (NPFT) covers overseas students and but also UK students who are not eligible for public funding such as Certificate courses and those students who had accessed OfS postgraduate funding previously. He also confirmed that Other Income Generating Activity was a very small element of the School's income and is not designed to deliver a material surplus.

The Board noted the minutes.

4.2 Minutes from Audit Committee

Pukar Mehta presented the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd November 2021. He reported that in addition to items also on the Board agenda, the Committee had received an internal audit of payroll showing substantial assurance of practice and processes, and he congratulated the HR team. He also advised that the auditors' report on Covid Lessons Learnt had concluded that the NFTS had managed the disruption well, and that the Committee had resolved that Business Continuity should be reviewed annually as part of the Risk Register.

The Board noted the minutes.

4.3 Minutes from Ethics Group

Geoff Crossick reported that the Group at its first meeting had discussed its remit and terms of reference, the School's Ethics Policy, and various scenarios in which it might be asked to advise.

The Group was recommending that the School's Ethics policy with regards to procurement should be revised to include reference to the ethical considerations of supply chains.

He explained that the Group also aimed to reassure itself that appropriate guidelines and processes for dealing with ethical issues were in place, and that difficult issues were being referred upwards for advice to HoDs/Management and ultimately to the Group.

Hilary Strong asked if the current situation in Ukraine was causing any problems for the School with regard to Russian students, and Jon Wardle reported that there were issues, such as Russian students being unable to access funding, but that the School was monitoring the situation and taking appropriate actions.

The Board noted the report.

4.4 Update on new Chair Appointment

Bal Samra reported that the appointments panel selected by GAR and the Board had recommended that Sophie Turner Laing (STL) be offered the position of Chair of the Board of the National Film & Television School with effect from 1st September 2022 for a period of three years.

He explained that six candidates had been interviewed, and whilst all were appointable, the panel had agreed unanimously that STL was the most impressive candidate, scoring highly on the six criteria used by the panel.

The panel recognised that STL had impressive experience in media and excellent connections in the industry. She was an individual who commanded attention, and cared about the skills and training agenda.

The panel also considered that she demonstrated an excellent appreciation of the rapid changes in the creative industries, and understood that the School therefore needed to continue to evolve in order to stay ahead of the competition. She also demonstrated a good understanding of the complexities of higher education funding and regulation. She had relevant experience of governance and governmental policy as a non-executive director, and had confirmed that she could commit sufficient time and energy to the role of Chair.

The Board was unanimous in confirming that she become the new Chair. Bal Samra also paid tribute to Patrick McKenna, the current chair, under whom the School had made tremendous progress. He advised that there would be appropriate occasions in the summer for the Board to thank Patrick for his outstanding contribution to the development of the NFTS.

RESOLVED: To invite Sophie Turner Laing become the Chair of the Board of the National Film & Television School with effect from 1st September 2022.

4.5 GAR Matters

Chris Wensley reported that GAR had recommended that Georgia Brown, Head of Amazon Studios, Europe, be invited to join the Board, and this was agreed.

RESOLVED: To invite Georgia Brown to join the Board of the National Film & Television School with effect from the June 2022 meeting.

5. Operational Matters

5.1 Annual Inclusion & Diversity Report – staff

Gillian Carr presented the annual report on staff diversity and inclusion. She reported improvements in key areas of focus from last year:

- Continuing to build an ethnically diverse workforce, with an increase in diversity of visiting tutors and permanent staff
- An increase in disclosure of a disability
- Almost all employees felt diversity and inclusion was valued at the School, a 10% increase on 2020.
- The School had maintained the gender balance across permanent staff.

The Board noted the report.

5.2 Annual Inclusion & Diversity Report – students

Eleanor Wheel presented the annual report on student diversity and inclusion. She reported that

- in terms of ethnic diversity, the percentage of UK domiciled entrants on the Masters courses had slightly increased, and had remained stable on Diploma courses, meeting the BFI target but slightly below the national average;
- female representation across the Masters and Diploma courses was above 50%, exceeding the BFI target;
- the School currently exceeded the industry disability target and the national average;
- in terms of socio-economic background of students, the School was making progress but remained below the target set by the BFI.

The Board noted the report.

5.3 Curriculum and Short Course Report

Jon Wardle updated the Board on key curriculum activity since the last meeting. He reported on the operation of the full-time curriculum, the development of new courses, the delivery of short courses, developments at national and regional hubs, the deliberations of the Academic Standards Committee, and complaints and misconduct.

He reported on the Student Survey that had looked at:

- School response to the Coronavirus
- Quality of Teaching and Learning
- Assessment and Feedback
- Organisation and Management
- Professional Development.

He advised that although the results were generally positive, in all areas there were mixed signals with responses to some statements showing a fall in agreement levels, others remaining unchanged and some seeing a rise in agreement levels. He attributed most of the decline in results to the fact that these students were those most affected by the Covid disruption to School life. He acknowledged, however, that there were clearly certain areas where improvement was required and that further work would be done to address issues, particularly in those courses where the results from the survey were below the NFTS average.

He also reported that the regional and national hubs had all seen an increase in activities since the relaxation of the Covid restrictions, and he provided examples of new initiatives in the centres.

Finally, he provided an overview of student complaints and misconduct, all of which he confirmed had been handled appropriately.

Ian Lewis asked about the incidents of serious misconduct, since in industry he felt these would have led to sackings. There was discussion about the fine distinctions between academic penalties for academic failure, and relevant penalties for serious misconduct in non-academic situations. It was agreed that if there was seriously inappropriate behaviour during the course, a student might be asked to withdraw, but that the penalties might be different if the course had already been completed. The SU President and the Registrar both reassured the Board that the disciplinary panel had considered a range of penalties and they were confident that appropriate actions had been taken. It was, however, agreed that reports to the Board, whilst remaining completely anonymous, should provide more context as to why particular actions had been taken.

The Board noted the report.

7. Any Other Business

There was none.

8. Date of Next Meeting: This was confirmed as Tuesday 21st June 2022 at 09.30 in London.