

NATIONAL FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS HELD ON TUESDAY 5th OCTOBER 2021 AT THE NFTS.

Present: Stephen Louis (Chair), Joe Bradbury-Walters, Phil Edgar-Jones, Sara Geater, Danielle Goff, Oli Hyatt, Ian Lewis, Andrew Macdonald, Steve Mertz, Laurent Samama, Bal Samra, Mary Stiasny, Hilary Strong, Jon Wardle (Director), and Pukar Mehta (by Zoom).

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

Apologies: Patrick McKenna, Geoffrey Crossick, Patrick Fuller, Rose Garnett, Caroline Hollick, Adil Ray, Sue Vertue, Colin Young.

Declaration of Personal Interests: None declared.

The Chair welcomed Hilary Strong who was attending her first meeting.

1. Board Briefing.

The meeting opened with a Demonstration of a Storyfutures Academy VR project.
The Board expressed appreciation of the high quality of the work.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

2.1 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the previous Board of Governors Meeting held on 22nd June 2021 were approved as an accurate record, after correction of one detail:
Item 2.2.4 should refer to agenda item 4.4, not 3.4.

2.2 Actions

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

2.3 Matters Arising.

There were none.

3. Context Setting and Updates.

3.1 Director's Report

The Director reported on his activities since June.

He gave an update on the degree-awarding powers application, and the draft report from the assessors.

He advised that the School had taken advice from an external adviser, formerly Head of Oversight and Accreditation at the QAA, and it was agreed that the assessors' report contained factual errors which the School was asking to be corrected. Accordingly, a detailed response was about to be submitted, together with a letter of support from the RCA which currently validates NFTS degrees.

The Board considered the external adviser's report and the School's response, and expressed its full support for the decision to respond in detail.

He also advised of the following developments:

- To celebrate the School's 50th anniversary, the new Digital Archive in partnership with Google Arts and Culture had launched; the BFI had curated an NFTS-at-50 season at Southbank; and an NFTS Alumni event with 580 graduates had been held at the School.

- The NFTS Fundraising Gala had been held in September with about 600 guests.
Hilary Strong commented that there had been no follow-up to some of the attendees who might have wished to donate but had not done so on the evening.
It was agreed that in future, email addresses of all those attending should be collected.
- All courses with a September start had recruited to capacity.
- Discussions were taking place with a developer about potential purpose-built student accommodation for exclusive use by the School.
- Developing from the immersive work led by Storyfutures Academy, a Certificate in Virtual Production with Warner Media as partner would launch shortly. In addition, the School was hoping to bid for newly-announced research funding for virtual production, developing from the achievements of Storyfutures Academy and the Pinewood Studios opportunities.
Bal Samra advised harnessing industry support for the project from Board members and NFTS supporters who were commissioners, independent producers etc.

The Board noted the report.

3.2 Finance Director's Report

Trevor Hall updated the Board on the School's financial performance for the year to 31 July 2021 which was slightly ahead of the budget forecast.

He explained that the results reflected stronger than anticipated recruitment of student numbers and cost savings, but were tempered by lower activity in the short course unit and the regional hubs due to the pandemic and the postponement of the Gala in June.

He explained that the School's finances remained robust, with the School operating comfortably within its loan covenants and with cash balances projected to be positive for the foreseeable future. He also advised that the Pension Scheme had shown a small actuarial gain.

The Board noted the report.

3.3 Student Union Report

Danielle Goff reported that students were pleased to be getting back to normal after the Covid disruptions, and that major productions were progressing well.

She reported on the activities of the Student Union which included continuing individual student support and guidance; organizing social events and student societies; inducting the new student reps; supporting the Access Conference in November.

The Board thanked Danielle for her report.

3.4 Staff Survey Results

Gillian Carr advised that the results of the Staff Survey were positive, despite the Coronavirus pandemic and showed a number of improvements in key areas, for example, bullying and harassment, support for the NFTS strategic plan, pride in working at the School, and attention given to diversity and inclusion. Just under 70% of staff had completed the survey.

She explained that the priorities for the next year were:

- Dealing with the aftermath of Covid and any future disruption.
- Inclusion & diversity.
- Well-being

- Staff professional development.

The Board asked why there had been a reduction in staff numbers who considered the School had handled the coronavirus pandemic well, and Jon Wardle advised that this was probably due to wider pandemic fatigue and inconsistent and changing guidance on restrictions at the national level.

There was further discussion about the reduction in the number of staff completing the survey, and this was referred to the F&GP Committee for detailed consideration.

ACTION: The January meeting of F&GP to review the Staff Survey with a view to increasing participation.

4. Strategy and Governance.

4.1 2020/21 KPI Review

Trevor Hall outlined the performance against the School's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2020/21.

He explained that these were aligned to the themes of the School's 2023 Corporate Plan:

- Creating opportunity;
- Working UK-wide;
- Exploring future storytelling;
- Unlocking & celebrating our legacy;
- Building on our success

He reported that the following measures were on track or had met target:

- Overall recruitment
- Recruitment of ethnically-diverse students.
- Recruitment of students from low socio-economic backgrounds
- Scholarships and bursary funding

Measures that were projected to fall slightly short of target included:

- Attendance at short courses and hubs was lower than projected.
- Student satisfaction fell just short of target but was still a strong result in light of the disruption caused by the pandemic.

The Board proposed that staff satisfaction should be added to the list of KPIs.

ACTION: Trevor Hall to add staff satisfaction to the list of KPIs.

4.2 2020/21 Vision, Objectives, Goals Review

Jon Wardle reported on the School's performance in delivering the specific objectives and goals set out in the 22-21 VOG paper.

The Board noted that most goals had been fully delivered, but that the following were only partially achieved:

- Reach 5,000 people through AccessNFTS.
Over 3,000 involved, but fewer events had taken place due to the complexities of the pandemic.
- Scale the activity of NFTS Scotland and Leeds.
Again, the pandemic had reduced participation.
- Secure Degree Awarding Powers.
Not yet achieved (see 3.1)
- Continue to strengthen the school's balance sheet.
A surplus had been achieved, but lower than pre-Covid results
- Raise new funds to support the school's scholarship activity and capital plans
A substantial sum had been raised at the Gala, but it was hoped the 50th anniversary events would produce further donations.

Bal Samra proposed a working party to develop a mid-term strategy for the national and regional hubs. He felt it important to define the ultimate goal, and to consider more investment in order to grow.

Pukar Mehta suggested that games companies could be persuaded to invest in the School since they made use of their graduates, and Hilary Strong added legal companies as another potential source of funding.

It was agreed that F&GP should consider more fund-raising support for the Director.

ACTIONS:

*** The Director to set up a working party to develop a mid-term strategy for the national and regional hubs; membership: Bal Samra and Andrew Macdonald, and others to be advised.**

*** F&GP to consider more fund-raising support for the Director.**

4.3 Annual Review of Board Terms of Reference

Chris Wensley presented the Board Terms of Reference for review.

He explained that each year the Board reviewed its terms of reference to confirm they were fit for purpose and if necessary to make amendments, but that this year, he did not feel any amendments were required.

He demonstrated how the ToR met the OfS public interest governance principles, and provided a checklist showing how the ToR were achieved.

The Board agreed that GAR Committee should be asked to review the skills and knowledge of the Board prior to the development of the new Five-Year Strategy in 2023 to ensure that new areas of development were covered.

4.4 Annual report on compliance with the OfS Conditions of Registration

Eleanor Wheel reminded members that at its March meeting, the Board had been presented with a document showing how it was assured that the School was compliant with the OfS's ongoing Conditions of Registration.

Since this document had been prepared, there had been no change to the Conditions of Registration, or to the way that the Board was assured that the conditions were being met.

4.5 OfS Statement of Expectations for preventing and addressing harassment and sexual misconduct affecting students in higher education

Eleanor Wheel presented an analysis of how the School met the OfS expectations for preventing and addressing harassment and sexual misconduct. She stressed that a key aim was to give students the confidence to report problems.

This analysis had been discussed at Audit Committee and at ASC, and the following actions identified:

- Revising the Student Code of Conduct.
- Providing Active Bystander training for students and refresher training for staff.
- Re-launching the 'Never OK' campaign.
- Reviewing School policies and procedures in respect of student misconduct, bullying and harassment and student complaints.
- Offering first responder training to key staff.
- Repeating training to all staff about what constitutes sexual misconduct.

The OfS had been advised of these actions.

4.6 Process for appointing new Chair of the Board

Bal Samra outlined the proposed process and schedule for appointing a new Chair of the Board.

He explained that Patrick McKenna, the current Chair, completed his term of office on 31st August 2022, and that the process to identify his replacement would be managed by a small Appointments Group set up by the Governance, Appointments and Remuneration Committee on behalf of the Board.

He advised that Saxton Bampfylde was proposed as the recruitment agency to assist with finding suitable candidates, and that Board members were invited to propose potential candidates. The brief given to the recruitment agency was: *Identify a candidate to chair the NFTS Board who is a highly experienced, inclusive leader, committed to the NFTS's mission and values. Candidates must demonstrate a clear appreciation of the importance of education and training for the creative industries, the cultural importance of those industries and their contribution to the UK economy, and a proven commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion.*

He tabled a draft person specification and role description that would form part of the public advertisement.

RESOLVED: To approve the process and schedule for the appointment of a new Board Chair.

5. Committee Reports

5.1 Minutes from F&GP Committee

Ian Lewis presented the minutes of the meeting held on 8th September 2021. He reported that all the major items discussed were on the Board agenda. The Board noted the minutes.

5.2 Minutes from Audit Committee

Sara Geater presented the minutes of the meeting held on 7th September 2021. She reported that in addition to items also on the Board agenda, the Committee had received one satisfactory assurance internal audit on environmental sustainability; the internal audit plan for next year; and the draft annual internal audit report which was likely to provide satisfactory assurance. She also advised that the Committee had completed a self-assessment process which produced positive responses. The Board noted the minutes.

5.3 Report from GAR Committee

Steve Louis reported that the Committee had discussed Board and Committee membership and new appointments. It had also discussed and approved proposals for senior staff remuneration, and it had considered the balance of face-to-face and online meetings for the Board and its committees, and was, for example, proposing for 2022 two Board meetings F2F (in June at the School and September in London) and two online (November and March). The Board noted the actions.

6. Operational Matters

6.1 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 appeals. He advised that a major focus had been upon those students finishing their courses this year, so that they had a positive finish after a year disrupted by Covid. The Board noted the report.

6.2 Annual Risk Register Report

Trevor Hall updated members on the change to the way risks to the School were monitored by the Audit Committee on behalf of the Board. He explained that work had been undertaken to review and rationalise the number of risks monitored. The Committee had agreed that its focus on key strategic risks rather than all risks was more effective, and that those risks no longer monitored by

Audit Committee should be transferred to Departmental Risk Registers and rigorously monitored by the relevant NFTS directorate.
The Board noted the report.

6.3 Annual H&S Report

Jon Wardle presented the annual review of health and safety matters over the previous twelve months. He reported that:

- F&GP had received H&S updates each quarter;
- appropriate measures had been taken following several minor incidents;
- Covid-19 Production Guidelines had been developed and rigorously enforced;
- the new H&S manager had rolled out a new training matrix for all students;
- all the actions identified in the school's annual fire risk assessment had been implemented;
- The external H&S Audit had focused on student safety on productions and had reported positively. Some areas for improvement had been identified, and management would ensure these were all implemented.

The Board noted the report.

6.4 NFTS Fellowship 2022

Jon Wardle advised that annually the NFTS Board of Governors awarded an NFTS Honorary Fellowship in recognition of outstanding contribution to the British film, television and games industries, and he outlined the proposed procedure for determining the 2022 recipient.

It was agreed that members should contact the Director with names of those they wished to support. GAR Committee would then consider all those nominated, and produce a short list for the November Board.

6.5 Review of Certificate in Filmmaking - Blended Learning

Jon Wardle presented an overview of the conclusions of an independent review of the School's first blended learning course, the Certificate in Filmmaking, which had been delivered successfully three times to cohorts of about fifty students.

He advised that the School had commissioned an independent consultant to review the provision and provide insight and recommendations as to how the Certificate could be developed. The report was very positive, but provided useful recommendations for improvement. Particular consideration had been given to how the course could be delivered with less live teaching and how to ensure it was successful for global cohorts. He envisaged that the report would also inform how the NFTS approached the development of other online learning opportunities.

The Board discussed blended learning, and recommended setting up a working party to include Board members with particular expertise, together with external members, to develop a long-term strategy to feed into the School's next five-year plan. The brief should be wide-ranging, to include global demand, potential fees, likely partners, and new subject areas.

Pukar Mehta suggested that a new post or consultants should be considered in order to support the Director.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 Final Board meeting of Stephen Louis and Steve Mertz

Jon Wardle on behalf of Management, and Bal Samra on behalf of the Board expressed sincere thanks to Stephen Louis and Steve Mertz who had served on the Board for many years, including as Chair of F&GP and Chair of Audit respectively, and who had guided the School through demanding periods of development and growth.

The Board thanked both for their valuable contribution to the School, and presented each with a token of appreciation.

8. Date of Next Meeting: This was confirmed as Tuesday 23rd November 2021 at 09.30 by Zoom.