

NATIONAL FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS HELD ON TUESDAY 22nd JUNE 2021 BY VIDEOCONFERENCE.

Present: Patrick McKenna (Chair), Stephen Louis (Deputy Chair), Joe Bradbury-Walters, Patrick Fuller, Sara Geater, Danielle Goff, Oli Hyatt, Ian Lewis, Andrew Macdonald, Pukar Mehta, Steve Mertz, Laurent Samama, Bal Samra, Mary Stiasny, Jon Wardle (Director).

In attendance: Trevor Hall (FD), Chris Wensley (Clerk).

Apologies: Geoffrey Crossick, Phil Edgar-Jones, Rose Garnett, Caroline Hollick, Adil Ray, Siobhan Reddy, Sue Vertue, Colin Young.

Declaration of Personal Interests: None declared.

1. Board Briefing.

The meeting opened with a presentation about the NFTS 50th Anniversary Archive by Shakil Mohammed, the Project Leader. He explained that the archive was being developed in partnership with Google Arts and Culture and featured graduation work, associated materials and interviews with the directors, together with thematic anthologies of NFTS work.

Lauren Samama reported that Google were very happy with the progress of the project, and asked about the launch plans. Jon Wardle explained that this was scheduled for September at the BFI festival of NFTS work. Oli Hyatt suggested future proofing the archive so that current and future students could deliver material ready for upload.

The Board thanked Shakil for a stimulating presentation.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

2.1 Minutes of the Last Meeting

Two minor amendments were made to the minutes of the previous Board of Governors Meeting held on 23rd March 2021 <3.1 'Head' of NFTS Wales, not 'Director' and 6.2 final line 'fee changes' not 'fee increase'> and the minutes were then approved as an accurate record.

2.2 Actions

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

Trevor Hall reported that a review of public policies is undertaken by the Audit Committee at its September meeting each year and that this would include the Freedom of Information Publication Scheme.

2.2.2 The Board to receive an annual report on compliance with the OfS Conditions of Registration.

Carried forward to the October meeting.

2.2.3 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.

Carried forward to the October meeting.

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

See item 4.4

ACTIONS CARRIED FORWARD:

- **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 March. With regard to the Covid pandemic, he advised that from the first week of March the School had returned to in-person teaching and learning at the School with a range of extra-curricular activities provided.

The Graduation Ceremony had successfully taken place on 24 May 2021, with the Graduate Showcase following over four days at BFI Southbank. He advised of a range of student successes at festivals and award events.

He explained that applications were slightly down on 2020 which had been distorted by the Covid crisis, but were up when compared with 2019 and previous years, with the proportion of Home compared to EU/International students broadly similar.

He advised of two new appointments to replace senior staff who had resigned, namely the HR Director and the Head of Production.

Finally, with regard to NFTS 50th anniversary celebrations, he advised that the Gala was confirmed for the 7th September, and that a BFI film season celebrating notable NFTS alumni was planned, as well as a Screen International supplement about the School and the NFTS archive of graduation films on Google Arts and Culture.

Danielle Goff asked about student involvement in the BFI Festival, and Jon Wardle explained that it was hoped that the films screened at the previous evening's live event would be screened at the School each day.

The Board noted the report.

3.2 Finance Director's Report

Trevor Hall updated the Board on the School's financial performance for the nine months to April 2021 which were in line with 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.

He explained that despite the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the loss of Gala income during the 20/21 financial year, he was optimistic that the end-of-year results would be broadly in line with forecast.

He also advised that the School's audio mixing desks had been replaced, with the procurement process scrutinised and endorsed by F&GP and approved by the Chair of the Board.

Bal Samra asked about the reduced income from the hubs and short courses, and Jon Wardle advised that this was caused predominantly by fewer F2F courses and by companies cutting back on training because of their busy schedules.

The Board noted the report.

3.3 Student Union Report

Danielle Goff reported that students were generally doing well and concentrating on finishing production work. She expressed thanks to the School for ensuring that the grad show took place physically, as this was important to the students involved. She advised that continuing social distancing measures were inhibiting SU social events,

but an end-of-year celebration was planned. Finally, she reported on the elections for the new student reps.

In answer to a question from Steve Louis, Danielle Goff advised that the job situation for graduating students was much more positive as there were many programmes and films now in production.

Oli Hyatt raised potential problems for future graduates since UK companies were being shut out of European co-productions because of Brexit and the UK's decision to withdraw from the Creative Europe initiative. Sara Geater said that PACT was also concerned about this and suggested that Jon Wardle liaise with John McVay, the CEO.

The Board thanked Danielle for her report.

4. Strategy and Governance.

4.1 OFS five-year forecast inc. key assumptions

Trevor Hall presented the financial reforecast for the five years to July 2026 which anticipated that surpluses would improve on 2020/21, a reflection of strong recruitment in January 2021 and the Covid-19 pandemic coming to an end. He detailed the key assumptions adopted in the five-year forecast, namely the level of Home and Overseas MA Fees; additional provisions against the risk of further Covid lockdowns; increases to staff pay and operating budgets; and Annual Gala income. He added that the F&GP Committee had asked management to investigate new initiatives to increase funding, for example developing the blended learning programme, and to report back. Finally, he reported that the OfS was reviewing its funding for arts subjects and for specialist institutions.

Patrick McKenna stressed that a central aim must be to continue to build financial resilience through increased reserves so that the School was able to deal with unexpected challenges, such as another pandemic, or changes to external funding streams.

Patrick Fuller asked about the financial impact if the School achieved degree-awarding powers, and Trevor Hall advised that he had taken a prudent view that it would be broadly neutral in the current forecast.

ACTION: To present a review of the blended learning programme to the October Board.

RESOLVED: To approve the five-year Office for Students Financial Forecast, including the increase in staff salaries.

4.2 Vision, Objectives, Goals 2021/22

Jon Wardle presented the key goals and tasks that the management team would work to deliver during 2021/22. He explained that 2021/22 would be a consolidation year, building upon and developing recent initiatives:

- Complete the move from 8-10
- Review the impact of the restructure of fees in light of Brexit
- Develop the NFTS Virtual Production offer
- Secure degree-awarding powers
- Develop and implement an Environment Plan
- Celebrate the School's 50th anniversary.

The Board noted the report.

4.3 Pinewood & Beaconsfield Campus Update

Jon Wardle updated the Committee on progress with the Pinewood Studios educational hub, and the Beaconsfield estate. He advised that a letter of intent had been signed with Pinewood, which was now seeking planning permission with the intention of completing the building work in 2023.

With regards to the Beaconsfield campus, was agreed that the School should be ready to develop the estate if funding became available, and Jon Wardle invited Board members to join a working party for this. Bal Samra also suggested further

development of the 'out-of-London' strategy, to include Beaconsfield and the regional and national hubs.

RESOLVED: Jon Wardle to establish a small working party, including Board members, to work on a new plan for developing the Beaconsfield estate.

4.4 50th Anniversary Gala update

Jon Wardle updated members on plans for 50th Anniversary Fundraising Gala in September. He explained that over two thirds of tables had been sold for the Gala, and that decisions on the contracts for the venue needed to be agreed as soon as the government announced plans for the remaining Covid restrictions.

There was discussion on how to involve students and alumni more fully in the Gala.

RESOLVED: To proceed with planning and contractual arrangements for the 2021 Gala.

4.5 NFTS Environment Action Plan

Jon Wardle presented the draft NFTS Environment and Sustainability strategy designed to ensure the NFTS played its part in meeting the UK net zero target. He explained that in late 2020 the School had commissioned the Carbon Trust to provide an update on the School's carbon footprint, which was last review by the Carbon Trust in 2015. A draft plan of action setting out a number of aims, targets and actions in areas such as minimising carbon emissions and embedding sustainable production practices was presented to members. These targets had been review by the Carbon Trust to ensure that they were appropriate and achievable.

Steve Louis asked how other HEIs were approaching this, and Jon Wardle advised that most of the larger universities' action plans were further advanced.

RESOLVED: To develop the plan further, discuss in detail at F&GP and bring back to the Board for approval.

5. Committee Reports

5.1 Minutes from F&GP Committee

Ian Lewis presented the minutes of the meeting held on 9th June 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 8th June 2021. She reported that in addition to items also on the Board agenda, the Committee had received four internal audits, two of which had received substantial assurance and two satisfactory assurance, and that all recommendations had been completed. She advised that the Committee recommended that KCG be re-appointed as internal auditors following the tender process and the positive external review of the KCG operation against the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors (CIIA) standards. Finally, she reported that the Committee had discussed risk assessment with the auditors and the School's defences against risks. In the light of the current political climate, particular attention was being given to freedom of speech, and to academic quality as the DAP process neared conclusion.

The Board noted the minutes.

ACTION: To re-appoint KCG as the School's internal auditors for a period of three years.

5.3 Report from GAR Committee

Chris Wensley on behalf of 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 minutes.

RESOLVED: To approve the appointment of Hilary Strong to the Board for an initial three-year term.

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 also reported on the degree-awarding powers process, including the various meetings with key stakeholders. He explained that the School was anticipating receiving an initial report from the panel in late August, with a final decision from the OfS in the autumn.

The Board noted the report.

6.2 Fifteen Month MA Degree Proposal

Jon Wardle presented a proposal to introduce fifteen-month MA degrees to the NFTS course portfolio.

He explained that these would replace a small number of the existing two-year MAs and would involve eleven months of tuition followed by four months of dissertation/project completion, alongside work experience or employment. He stressed that revised MAs would not be developed in areas such as MA Cinematography or MA Directing Fiction which required the completion of a major creative production project and a high quality showreel. Rather, the revised courses would be in disciplines such as MA Digital Effects or MA Marketing, Distribution, Sales and Exhibition, the rationale for the proposal being that these courses were in direct competition with one-year courses at UK universities with much cheaper fees, and could be delivered effectively at the NFTS more efficiently.

Ian Lewis advised that F&GP had been concerned that the two-year MAs were not devalued by the introduction of shorter MAs, and Mary Stiasny stressed that there must be absolute clarity about the rationale for two-year, fifteen months or one year programmes, and that the focus must be upon consolidation, concentration and specialisation.

The Board noted the paper and asked to be kept fully informed of developments.

7. Any Other Business

Patrick McKenna reported that this was Siobhan Reddy's final meeting and thanked her for her contribution to the Board. Chris Wensley advised that Siobhan had expressed her appreciation for the opportunity of serving on the Board and wished the 'incredible NFTS' all the very best.

8. Date of Next Meeting: This was confirmed as Tuesday 5th October 2021 at 09.30 **at the NFTS.**