

NATIONAL FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS HELD ON TUESDAY 6th OCTOBER 2020 BY VIDEOCONFERENCE.

Present: Patrick McKenna (Chair), Stephen Louis (Deputy Chair), Riffy Ahmed, Geoffrey Crossick, Neil Forster, Patrick Fuller, Sara Geater, Caroline Hollick, Oli Hyatt, Tim Kyte, Ian Lewis, Andrew Macdonald, Pukar Mehta, Steve Mertz, Siobhan Reddy, Laurent Samama, Bal Samra, Mary Stiasny, Sue Vertue, Jon Wardle (Director).

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

Apologies: Phil Edgar-Jones, Adil Ray, Colin Young.

Declaration of Personal Interests: None.

The Chair welcomed Prof. Mary Stiasny to her first meeting.

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

1.1 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the previous Board of Governors Meeting held on 23rd June 2020 were approved as an accurate record.

1.2 Actions

1.2.1 The GAR Committee to begin the process to find appropriate candidates to become Deputy Chair of the Board.

The Chair reported that the GAR committee was recommending that Ian Lewis becomes Chair of F&GP and takes over from Steve Louis as Deputy Chair when he steps down next year.

This was agreed unanimously.

He also advised that the following members had agreed to serve a further three-year term:

- Laurent Samama – has also joined F&GP
- Geoff Crossick
- Neil Forster
- Andrew MacDonald
- Patrick Fuller
- Adil Ray

It was noted that all other actions were dealt with 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 June 2020, but in light of the current Covid-19 crisis, he focused particularly on its impact upon the School, following the closure on 17th March 2020, and its phased re-opening from 7th June. He explained that students due to finish over the summer had had their course dates extended, and that detailed plans for the Autumn Term had been published describing the planned mix of face-to-face and online teaching. He then took the Board through the arrangements that had been made to enable the School to re-open safely, including

making the site COVID-safe and additional online student support for those self-isolating. There had been one positive case of Covid reported during the four months of teaching, and appropriate tracing and isolating actions had been taken. Finally, he was pleased to report that all courses starting in September had met their student recruitment targets, many with reserve lists, and that recruitment to the MA courses starting in January remained strong, although new outbreaks could impact upon this.

Other than the coronavirus crisis, the Director also advised that the BBC had renewed its 'key partner' contract on a three-year deal; that continued funding from DCMS and Channel 4 appeared secure; that the leased Golden Square building was now being used for teaching; and that the current plan was to hold the Gala as normal on 30th June 2021.

Finally, he thanked his colleagues for all their hard work and support during the crisis.

Laurent Samama asked about support from online companies such as Amazon, Apple and Netflix, and Jon Wardle advised that all were supportive, but that currently any support was limited to very specific short term projects.

2.2 Finance Director's Report

Trevor Hall updated the Board on the School's financial performance since the last meeting.

He explained that the pandemic had had a material impact on the School's finances: the financial performance for the year to July 2020 showed a lower surplus than planned, but the School's finances remained robust and sustainable.

He also reported a significant increase in the pension deficit caused by the devaluation of government gilts. The School had proposed additional contributions over time, and an independent review of the employer covenant.

Although there had been strong recruitment to the September 2020 cohort, he proposed that the prudent forecast for 2020/21 not be changed given the inherent uncertainty that the pandemic posed to future performance.

He also advised that the School's media storage system (ISIS) had come to the end of its useful life and that a new system, Edit Share, had been purchased.

2.3 Student Union Report

Riffy Ahmed reported on a variety of SU actions undertaken to support students during the Covid-19 crisis, including measures to reassure students who were anxious about financial, accommodation and production issues. She also advised of SU initiatives to support Black Lives Matter.

She reported that a new SU logo and the SU by-laws had been formally approved, and that elections were imminent for the Student Council and for the next Student President.

2.4 Staff Survey Results.

Kate Renwick advised that the results of the Staff Survey were positive and showed a number of improvements in key areas, for example, overall satisfaction and bullying and harassment. The only significant drop was understanding of the corporate plan.

She also reported a high level of approval for working at the School, change management, handling the Coronavirus crisis and collaboration.

She explained that the priorities for the next year were:

- Inclusion & diversity – including the anti-racism commitment.
- Well-being
- Understanding the Corporate plan

- Collaboration
- Recognition

Patrick McKenna and Sara Geater suggested the word 'Corporate' in Corporate Plan was unhelpful, and Geoffrey Crossick felt that understandably people were more focussed on the crisis than the Corporate Plan.

Pukar Mehta asked if the tools to report bullying and harassment were appropriate.

Kate Renwick explained that the current systems seemed to be working well.

Patrick Fuller and Mary Stiasny felt that the figures in this area were better or equivalent to those in other HEIs, that the direction of travel showed improvement, and that encouraging people to talk about problems was important.

Geoff Crossick agreed and felt the figures were very impressive, especially in the light of problems being experienced in other HEIs.

2.5 Anti-Racism Commitments Action Plan

Jon Wardle presented the School's Anti-Racism Commitment and the associated action plan for the seven pledges:

- Double the number of BAME teachers and increase the diversity of staff.
- Treat student diversity targets as a minimum not a maximum.
- Increase access through Outreach to create viable entry routes into the School for black students.
- Decolonise the curriculum to better highlight diverse stories and storytellers.
- Deliver annual diversity training for all staff and students.
- Analyse and address power inequalities, for example by reviewing financial spend and curriculum setting to try to ensure that people feel they are equally represented throughout the School.
- Support our BAME graduates to help them find industry allies and partners to enable them to achieve their full potential.

Pukar Mehta suggested that the School tap into the demand from broadcasters and production companies wanting to increase the diversity of their workforce, and Sara Geater suggested using existing BAME creative industry agencies for this.

It was also agreed that it would be useful for the Director to write to production companies at an appropriate time reminding them of the School's work in BAME talent development and its provision of short-course training.

3. Strategy and Governance.

3.1 2019-20 KPI Review

Trevor Hall reported on performance against the School's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) over the last 12 months.

He advised that the School's Key performance indicators (KPIs) to July 2020 were aligned to the School's 2023 Corporate Plan, the themes being:

- Creating opportunity;
- Working UK-wide;
- Exploring future storytelling;
- Unlocking & celebrating the School's legacy;
- Building on the success of the School.

He reported that performance against most targets was either on or exceeded target, notably:

- Recruitment of BAME students.
- Operating UK-wide.
- Graduate employment.

However, measures that fell slightly short of target included:

- Student recruitment.
- Student satisfaction.
- Percentage of students from low socio-economic households.

Ian Lewis asked whether scholarships and bursaries could be better directed at students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and Jon Wardle advised that it was important to grow the pot, so that more Diploma students could be considered. He added that Post-Graduate Career Development Loans were no longer offered by banks, limiting access to funding for Diploma students.

Geoffrey Crossick noted that the data used to measure low socio-economic households was unsatisfactory and suggested the School consider using widely-used alternative methods.

ACTION: That the Executive prepare a paper detailing the proposed new measure for tracking the socio-economic background of students.

3.2 2019-20 Vision, Objectives, Goals Review

Jon Wardle reported on the School's performance in delivering the specific objectives and goals set out in the 2019-20 VOG paper.

The Board noted that, with one exception, all goals had been either fully delivered, were on track for delivery, or had been temporarily delayed by the Covid crisis. The one exception was to secure a broadcast commission for a 50th anniversary film about the NFTS.

The Chair invited members to liaise with Jon Wardle to promote the anniversary film.

3.3 Phase 3 & Land Purchase

Jon Wardle updated the Committee on the proposals to re-develop the School Beaconsfield site and described progress with raising funds as well as plans to make up any shortfall. Tim Kyte reported that staff fully supported the project.

RESOLVED: That the Executive should continue to progress the project.

3.4 New CUC Code of Governance

Chris Wensley advised that the CUC had issued a new Higher Education Code of Governance, replacing the 2014 Code, describing best practice for HEI governing bodies, and he also drew attention to the Public Interest Governance Principles for HE with which the OfS expected institutions to align.

3.5 Annual Review of Board Terms of Reference

Chris Wensley presented the revised Board Terms of Reference for approval. 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, and that this year, they had been amended to reflect the recently-published CUC Higher Education Code of Governance, and to ensure they aligned with the Public Interest Governance Principles for HE.

Geoff Crossick proposed that an explicit protocol between the Board and the School's Academic Standards Committee to test assurance that academic governance is adequate and effective should be agreed and published.

After further discussion, the Board made a couple of minor amendments which were agreed.

ACTION: The Executive to set out how the Board may be assured that academic governance is adequate and effective.

RESOLVED: To adopt the revised Board Terms of Reference, subject to the changes agreed.

4. Committee Reports

4.1 Minutes from F&GP Committee

Steve Louis presented the minutes of the meeting held on 9th September 2020. He reported that the Committee had received assurance that the NFTS was a going concern, and he also advised that the Committee had agreed that there should be a briefing to the Board at the next meeting regarding Governors' responsibilities under the OfS Regulatory Framework. The Board noted the minutes.

4.2 Minutes from Audit Committee

Sara Geater presented the minutes of the meeting held on 8th September 2020. She drew specific attention to the Committee's intention to re-tender the internal audit function and to the revised terms of reference that were being developed to bring the Committee in line with the recently-published CUC Code for Audit Committees. The Board noted the minutes.

5. Operational Matters

5.1 Curriculum and Short Course Report

Jon Wardle updated the Board on key curriculum activity since the last meeting, including summary information about short courses, the operation of the full-time curriculum, the development of new courses, academic standards, partnerships and recruitment. He advised that the national and regional hubs had been adversely affected by the Covid lockdown, but were now resuming activities, and he was pleased to report encouraging progress with developing an NFTS Wales hub. He also drew attention to the effects on other courses of the Covid epidemic, and also reported on the recent Academic Standards Committee which was attended by representatives from the Board. Bal Samra suggested that a more detailed strategic and business plan for developing the national and regional hubs would be useful.

5.2 Annual Risk Register Report

Trevor Hall updated members on the change of risks to the School, as monitored by Audit Committee on behalf of the Board over the last 12 months. He advised that in light of the pandemic, a number of risks had been updated by the Executive and reviewed by the Audit Committee:

- Health & Safety
- Student recruitment & retention
- Cost of student productions
- Financial Sustainability

After discussion, the Board agreed that Risk 5.4 *Failure to be more inclusive, making staff base as diverse as the student body* should be upgraded to amber since such a failure would have significant impact.

The Board noted the paper.

ACTION: The Executive to upgrade to amber Risk 5.4 *Failure to be more inclusive, making staff base as diverse as the student body*.

5.3 Annual H&S Report

Annalise Davis presented a review of health and safety matters over the previous twelve months. She reported that:

- all the recommendations from the last H & S Audit had been completed;
- appropriate measures had been taken following one reportable accident, and several minor incidents;

- a new H&S manager had been appointed who was reviewing production activity and H&S training;
- additional measures had been put in place as a result of the Covid epidemic.

5.4 NFTS Fellowship

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 2021 recipient.

It was agreed that members should contact the Director with names of those they wished to support, and Jon Wardle advised that he would personally welcome international nominations.

5.5 Ethics Advisory Group.

Jon Wardle presented a proposal for a Board Advisory Group to provide guidance on the ethical dimensions and implications of the School's activities as required.

ACTION: GAR to nominate three Board members to join the Ethics Advisory Group.

RESOLVED: To establish an Ethics Advisory Group.

5.6 Saudia Arabia Training.

Jon Wardle updated the Board of Governors on a potential commercial training opportunity in Saudi Arabia to develop high potential filmmakers. He advised that following discussions with Chatham House and analysis of British Council advice, it was proposed to proceed with the project.

Sara Geater said it was essential to ensure that the course included women students, and Pukar Mehta agreed, adding that the School must define the terms on which it engages to ensure a proper cross-section of students, with fees paid by the organiser in advance.

RESOLVED: The Executive to continue to develop the commercial training programme in Saudi Arabia, and if appropriate to sign a contract provided that it ensures a proper cross-section of students, and that fees are paid in advance.

5.7 DAPs Update

Eleanor Wheal reported that the School had submitted its application for Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs) to the Office for Students on 3rd March 2020, and had recently been informed that the School's application could proceed to a review by the QAA without the usual first stage scrutiny of its financial viability and governance arrangements taking place, since the OfS did not consider it could form a reasonable assessment of any institution's financial position because of the uncertainty created by Covid-19. This scrutiny would instead be carried out following the QAA's review later next year.

The School intended to submit its Critical Self-Assessment and supporting evidence to the QAA by 8 October 2020. If an initial assessment is satisfactory, it would then proceed to a full scrutiny by a team of QAA assessors, with the first visit likely to be in February 2021.

The Board noted the report.

6. Any Other Business

7. Date of Next Meeting: This was confirmed as Tuesday 24th November 2020 at 09.30 by videoconference.

The Chair thanked Tim Kyte for his valuable contributions to the Board during his time as the staff representative.