

NOVEMBER 2020 UPDATE
OF THE
BLACK FURTHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP GROUP UK

Dear supporters and signatories

Open letter to address systemic racism in further education 4 August 2020

We are pleased to report that the Black Further Education Leadership Group (BFELG) Open letter to Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson, Prime Minister, RT Hon Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State for Education, funders of further education colleges, regulatory bodies & further education membership bodies continues to generate interest and activity within the sector.

The number of signatories to the Open letter has continued to grow and today, Friday 13 November stands at 310 – up from 224 on 13 October. (Please see attached). Over 30% of college Principals/CEOs and/or Chairs are now signatories.

On 7th October we met with Toby Perkins MP, Shadow Minister, Apprenticeships and Lifelong Learning to discuss the issues raised in our Open letter. The minister posed insightful questions and we were pleased to discuss related matters of mutual interest.

BFELG focus

BFELG itself has grown to a membership of 340 from 248 this time last month. Members include current and former governors, principals, senior leaders, managers, lecturers, business services staff in Further and Higher Education and other interested individuals. Following the adoption of a constitution at our members meeting in October, BFELG UK has now been incorporated as a company limited by guarantee.

Within the discourse of anti-racism, there is a revived debate on the terminology (people of colour, BAME, BME, ABME, and others) used to refer to people of minority ethnic descent. As explained in our October Update, in the BFELG context, 'Black' is used as an inclusive definition. It refers to minority ethnic protagonists from diverse, cultural and community backgrounds, who share lived experiences of the effects of racial inequalities, and who are unified in membership of the BFELG, a dynamic anti-racist movement for sustainable change. This said, the BFELG is developing multi-racial anti-racist partnerships and allyships. We are also proactively seeking to work in partnership with all sector and system colleagues, adopting the principle that it is upon us all to confront the issue of race inequality in FE so that collectively we can begin to address the underlying challenges for the benefit of our country and all our communities.

Our series of thought leadership articles published in FE News continues this month with an excellent contribution by BFELG member, Suki Dhesi Vice Principal – Teaching, Learning & Quality/Head of Havant Campus, HSDC: <https://www.fenews.co.uk/featured-article/57449-why-the-blue-eyed-brown-eyed-experiment-is-even-more-relevant-50-years-on>. Suki writes about how as part of their

whole college training day, HSDC used the BFELG '[10 Point Plan](#)' to facilitate their understanding of actions required to address racism.

Other articles in the FE News series include:

September:

Contribution by BFELG member, Amarjit Basi <https://www.fenews.co.uk/featured-article/54198-black-fe-leaders-group-if-not-us-who-if-not-now-when>

And in a wide ranging FE News podcast interview, Amarjit Basi and Robin Landman OBE, Executive team members unpacked key BFELG perspectives <https://www.fenews.co.uk/fevoices/224-podcasts/55930-unpacking-the-black-fe-leadership-group-with-robin-landman-and-amarjit-basi>

October:

Contribution by one of the very few minority ethnic Chair of Governors in the sector, Shaid Mahmood (Luminate Education Group Chair) and BFELG member in which he calls on all FE Chairs and the sector to address the issue of further education leadership, governance and management not adequately representing the make-up of some of the communities it serves: *Further Education leadership, governance and management is at crossroads* <https://fenews.us20.list-manage.com/track/click?u=b50579c7e5d0a0937b529c7f9&id=e936159040&e=c01caee76e>

System level engagement

Last month, we reported that we had been invited by the DfE to a meeting to input into the forthcoming White Paper and were very much looking forward to the opportunity. We have now held two highly productive meetings with senior DfE officials and are pleased to have been able to provide black perspectives on various issues relating to workforce, students and communities, which could impact on the effectiveness of policy if not properly understood or addressed.

Separately, we have been in communication with Dr Richard Garrett, Head of Surveys and Research, Skills Policy Analysis, DfE over workforce data collection. The ESFA is developing a mandatory [data collection for the further education workforce](#), on behalf of DfE. Before the collection is launched, it is important that all of the questions and answer options are clear and easy to understand and that the collection is easy to navigate and fill in. It is planned to open the collection in June / July 2021 to collect data on the academic year 2020/21.

In order to ensure the data collection is as user friendly as possible, ESFA are undertaking user testing of aspects of the data collection. These testing sessions are specifically aimed at those with responsibility for HR data or who would potentially fill out the data collection within providers. The user testing will happen over Microsoft Teams and each session will take approximately an hour. If you are a potential data collection user and would be interested in taking part please contact alex.perry@education.gov.uk. Your input and feedback will be valuable.

We also urge all BFELG supporters and members to respond to the data collection when it opens.

Collection of workforce data links directly to Priority 4 of the BFELG 10 Point Plan so we are advocating rigour and completeness of sectoral data for the current year. We are concerned about the state of sectoral governance data in particular, and very mindful of the need to further refine and contextualise data collection and analysis in the light of emergent changes in the governance and leadership structures associated with the FE Sector, for example Large College Group structures and Reciprocal Governance structures. Also of concern for data collection are demographic changes especially in the increasing diversity of student/local populations in City regions/cities/towns and the implications for appropriately representative FE governance, leadership and workforce. There may also be implications for data collection/analysis in the light of the emerging White Paper.

We have expressed our concerns to Dr Richard Garrett.

Sectoral level engagement

BFELG relationships with sector organisations and stakeholders continue to develop. Since our last Update, we have met with the Group CEO City & Guilds and BFELG signatory, Kirstie Donnelly MBE, the National Education Union (NEU) General Deputy Secretary Amanda Brown, Bill Watkin CEO Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA), National Union of Students (NUS) officials, Salsabil Elmegri Vice President FE, Virginie Assal Campaign & Influencing Manager.

We are absolutely delighted that Natspec, a membership organisation representing 99 specialist SEN providers across England and Wales, have fully endorsed the BFELG 10 point plan. We very much look forward to working with them on curriculum and other matters.

We are equally delighted that CollegauCymru (CollegesWales), the voice of further education in Wales, is supportive of the BFELG's work and Open letter and will provide practical support to extend this work to Wales. Both organisations look forward with confidence to an effective collaboration around our shared endeavours.

Our partnership with the AoC is progressing well. We are pleased to include, directly from the AoC for this Update, the paragraph below which highlights their work in our mutual areas of interest:

***AoC** have extended the membership of its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion steering group to other membership organisations to ensure sector-wide action to tackle discrimination and inequality, an [EDI action plan](#) has been developed by the group and signed off by the Board of AoC in early October and shared with members last week. In the last month, the group and representatives have engaged with officials from DfE on workforce recruitment, development and data collection, the FE White paper; Ofqual on the frameworks regarding assessment content; ESFA on support for colleges on publishing diversity data with meetings planned in November with Ofsted to explore the focus on EDI in the next inspection framework. AoC is also hosting a [leadership summit](#) in November with a keynote speech with Dr Leroy Logan MBE (BFELG signatory) and a panel session with college leaders discussing their progress on understanding the lived experience of black staff in their own organisation following on from the increase in the Black Lives Matter initiative in June of this year. AoC are also in the process of surveying sector seniors managers on how they lead on*

inclusion within the organisation, we will share our progress on improving AoC as an inclusive employer as our action plan develops. AoC are working in partnership with ETF on recruiting a [Director of Diversity](#) on a one-year secondment basis (in the first instance) to support both organisations in driving this agenda.

Whilst the BFELG does not endorse approaches which subsume anti-racism under the broad Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) heading, we are pleased to have the opportunity to act as a critical friend to the AoC and to highlight its growing work in the area of, and commitment to anti-racism.

We have been able to share our emerging thinking on FE policy and practice through a Black lens with AoC experts Julian Gravatt and David Corke and have discussed governance very recently with Kurt Hall and Kirsti Lord. We would like to take this opportunity to thank David Hughes, AoC Chief Executive for his support.

At the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) Conference held on 12 November, Palvinder Singh, Group Deputy Principal, Kidderminster College/NCG and BFELG member, presented on *The Social Consciousness of the FE Sector*. He spoke powerfully and passionately about what 2030 might look like in the context of social and race disparity, the politics and media landscape, and the post 16 skills context over the decade. This discourse is very much at the heart of BFELG's work.

Engagement with Colleges

A number of college senior leadership teams and boards have asked how they can engage with the BFELG 10 Point Plan in a structured way. In response, we are delighted that BFELG will be hosting a webinar/conference in partnership with HSDC on using the 10 Point Plan. Suki Dhesi, Vice Principal and BFELG member, from her background of leading with deep insight into the issues and her own lived experience, will share the process and methodology being used by HSDC as they begin their EDI journey and which has resulted in over 50 HSDC staff signing the BFELG Open letter.

Celebration of Success

Looking back at the work of the BFELG since inception, we are truly humbled by what has been achieved by a small membership group working totally in a voluntary capacity. We do not take for granted the willingness of key stakeholders to support the change required to move towards a more positive climate for all, underpinned by anti-racism. Together, we have been able to influence the following:

- BFELG 10 point plan written into the Job Description of a national role – Director of Diversity (ETF/AoC)
- Appointment process for new Chair for the Association of Colleges (AoC)
- Composition of interview panel for the replacement post of FE Commissioner <https://publicappointments.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/appointment/further-education-commissioner-2/> . We hope that this will attract a more diverse group of applicants.
- Working with a group of specialist search companies to develop Anti-Racist recruitment principles and protocols

- The College of the Future: the UK-wide final report from the Independent Commission on the College of the Future recommendations.

Appreciation

We remain highly appreciative of the open support you have shown, your commitment and willingness to act. Please do continue to support the BFELG in the following ways:

For college leaders:

- Share our Open Letter with your staff, students, governors and other stakeholders and encourage conversations and dialogue
- Explore, adopt and implement the BFELG 10 Point Plan in your organisation
- Adopt the use of anti-racism terminology

For other leaders

- Share the BFELG Open letter with your staff, networks and encourage conversations and dialogue within your spheres of influence
- Explore, adopt/adapt and implement the BFELG 10 Point Action in your organisation
- Adopt and use anti-racism terminology
- Consider becoming a college governor in your local community
- Consider becoming a mentor to a BFELG member who works in a college

Thank you all for what you are doing for students, staff and communities in these difficult times, in whatever particular circumstances you find yourselves in. Do stay safe.

With our very best wishes

Stella

Stella Ngozi Mbubaegbu CBE

13 November 2020

On behalf of the Black Further Education Leadership Group