Equality and Diversity Annual Report 2020 – 2021

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1. Introduction

This report demonstrates how the Bedford College Group (BCG) is meeting the public sector general and specific equality duties, and provides evidence that we show due regard to:

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Fostering good relations between different groups
- Advancing equality of opportunity.

Our main documents for driving improvements in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are:

- Single Equality Scheme and action plan;
- Race Equality action plan;
- Self-Assessment Reports and Quality Improvement Plans.

2. Embedding equality and diversity into the Bedford College Group

Governors and senior leaders have an active involvement in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. EDI updates are discussed at the Executive and monitored by the Board.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee
- Chaired by a Vice Principal with representatives from all functions and the Board;
- Identifies priorities and challenges practices and development of EDI, in particular where progress is limited or in support of underrepresented or disadvantaged individuals or groups.

Equality Impact Assessment
- The impact on groups of people, especially those with a protected characteristic, is considered in our policy development and the improvement of accommodation and facilities;
- In 2020-21 we assessed and reviewed the following policies for their impact on groups of people in relation to the protected characteristics: Apprenticeship Quality Assurance policy, Communication Strategy, Learning, Teaching and Assessment policy, Observation policy, Quality strategy, Quality Intervention policy, Staff Appraisal process, Student Anti-bullying policy, Withdrawal process, Work Experience policy, and Visitor policy.

Diversity Ambassadors
- We have a network of team-based Diversity Ambassadors who act as a 'catalyst' ensuring that EDI issues are discussed and kept high on the agenda in every department;
- The Ambassadors have been identified as a key strength in the promotion of EDI in their areas.

Staff Diversity Forums
- We support four staff resource groups – DisAbility Advisory Forum, LGBT+ Forum, Race Equality Forum and Women's Staff Network;
- The group members, led by nominated co-chairs, have provided a sounding board for college improvements in relation to gender non-binary inclusion, adjustments in the use of PPE, digital accessibility, staff recruitment, progression and development, menopause and a system for anonymous raising of concerns;

- The groups have promoted awareness of inclusion and diversity by hosting panel discussions with external panellists 'Let's talk about…', organising campaigns such as #ChooseToChallenge and updates with booklists, films, podcasts and posters.

> **LGBT+ staff forum – highlights:**
> ✓ Worked with Marketing to introduce an email signature with personal pronouns
> ✓ Established a network of LGBT+ support officers for students
> ✓ Developed LGBT+ Moodle support pages for students
> ✓ Consulted on suitability of gender neutral toilets

Executive Sponsors
- We have developed the role of an Executive Sponsor and senior leaders have self-nominated to act as EDI champions for disability, ethnicity, LGBT+ and women;
- The Executive Sponsors have provided a voice for a staff diversity forum and supported recommendations for improvements of College's practice.

EDI Information, Materials and Support
- We maintain a comprehensive EDI information hub on the staff intranet with most recent materials such as videos, guides and articles on anti-racism, being an ally, accessibility, gender stereotypes, intersex, supporting Muslim staff and students during Ramadan, and faith guides for the education sector;
- We update all staff and raise awareness of inclusion and diversity through monthly diversity updates, including a popular series in the Connect newsletter 'What inclusion means to me' with contributions by staff members and students;
- We have online support forums for the Diversity Ambassadors and the staff diversity groups;
- We have developed a Manager Toolkit including information on workplace support for wellbeing, mental health, menopause, and making reasonable adjustments.
- We have launched a free Wellbeing virtual centre for staff.
- We provide access to an Employee Assistance Programme, which is a free and confidential helpline for support and guidance on topics such as Health and Wellbeing, Mental Health, Menopause, Finances, Family, Bereavement, Guidance on COVID-19, Addiction, Stress, anxiety and depression.
- We have maintained our Disability Confident recognition and signed up to the AoC Mental Health Charter.

EDI Professional Development for Staff
- A training module 'Positive about Equality and Diversity' for all new staff;
- EDI training and support tailored to the needs of different roles: for Personal Achievement Tutors, new teachers, Course Managers, and curriculum teams;
- LGBT+ awareness sessions for staff in curriculum and professional areas;
- Youth Mental Health First Aid training for all pastoral members of staff and in curriculum areas;
- Training sessions to support additional needs, for instance, on assistive technology, and neurodiversity;

LET'S TALK ABOUT…

BEING BLACK

All staff are invited to a panel discussion focusing on the experiences of black people in Britain today.

- The all-staff conference had the overall theme of 'Inclusion: Belonging without Conformity' and included sessions on Mental Health, Menopause support, The Impact of Bias and micro-aggressions, Neurodiversity, Gender inclusion, Challenging prejudice and stereotyping, Trans and non-binary inclusion, Digital accessibility, and Becoming an active ally for minoritised voice. Some feedback from attendees:

'This was a great session, I took notes and shared with the team in the reflection pod. I will change some practice. It gave me more confidence regarding customer service and answered my query about addressing formal letters when you don't know someone's gender expression.'
'Useful examples of how to respond to challenges in real world situations. Excellent session with real life examples and techniques to use, for example, when dealing with micro-aggressions.'
'The speaker explained everything very clearly and made some strong points about structural racism in the UK. Those who felt they had experienced some form of racism were able to speak up and there was a great sense of community.'

Support and Interest Groups for Learners
- LGBTQIA+, Trans, Black Culture Club and Disability awareness ran across a number of College campuses;
- Equality and Diversity student reps worked to promote the groups and amplify their voices;
- The groups collaborated virtually through MS Teams, email and social media. One participating student said:

'Having other people who have gone through the same thing as me and help me understand my worries was amazing, it really got me through a scary time.' A QAgenda member on support they received whilst coming out to family in 2021.

Opportunities for Learners to Develop their Understanding of EDI
- In induction, tutorials and enrichment activities and celebrations of key dates from the diversity calendar e.g. Black History Month, World Mental Health Day, World Religion Day, LGBT History Month, and Women's International Day;
- The established LIVE Talks moved to a virtual platform, including a series of videos which mirrored the themed months and awareness days set out in the diversity calendar e.g. Black history month, LGBT+ awareness and others;
- The Mental Health Awareness Week's theme was 'Nature' and we created interactive displays at all campuses, hosted hot chocolate and chat events, lunchtime de-stress activities and worn a green ribbon. Students learnt how connecting with nature can support positive mental health and after a year online getting outside can be just what they need;

The Union reps undertook Mental Health and Wellbeing session as part of their study programme. To reach all students including Apprentices and HE students, the reps sent out a Wellbeing email with interactive links, web pages and videos on staying connected, sleep, being active and reducing stress.

To ensure that students have healthy, enjoyable and safe relationships on and offline, we put a spotlight on personal safety and preventing bullying, sexual harassment and violence. Students had access to information and advice via the Wellbeing Zones or LIVE team drop- ins at each campus, and on the LIVE Moodle pages. In partnership with the Union Gender reps a poster 'ITS NOT OK' was designed and displayed on Moodle and across the campuses.

EDI Related Projects and Tasks in Individual Subject Areas, for instance:

- In Art & Design, learners participated in the 'Black Heroes and Heroines' brief for the SpeculArts foundation in Bedford and created portraits of their heroes, including of their GCSE maths tutor. The cultural studies programme briefs highlighted and encouraged diversity-based issues including Afrofuturism, an Art movement that looks to explore the lack of black culture depicted through futurism, asking learners to look to the future and consider how they see Black culture developing.
- In Performing Arts, learners took part in 'Windrush' performance; within lesson they explored make-up and hair styles from different cultures; and had open discussions on students' preferred pronouns.
- In Foundation, students created awareness raising posters during 'LGBTQ' month, and created and prepared a menu to celebrate Eid at the end of Ramadan. Students were encouraged to share personal experiences e.g. information about their faith and experience of Ramadan.
- In Computing, a weekly newsletter was emailed to all students including key diversity dates, festivals and celebrations.
- In Counselling, students explored the impact of discrimination and understanding of relevant legislation, and topics such as Black Lives Matter, white privilege, structural discrimination, intersectionality, othering, and students were encouraged to explore their own prejudices.
- In Health and Social Care, students learnt about methods of communication considering how those with visually or hearing impairment could receive health education messages, and what adaptations could be made for them. When studying nutrition, students discussed religions' implications on people's diet and researched foods and religious festivals. When studying anatomy and physiology, students learnt about consent including how some religions may not allow certain medical procedures and the ethics behind this.
- In Business, through a job centre / recruitment scenarios learners considered the best person for the job while interrogating assumptions and stereotypes covering all protected characteristics.
- A student's comment from a focus group regarding their English lessons:

'… throughout the course we learnt about people from all walks of life, from Jews in WW2 to black women working in early 1900s America. The learning was very diverse.'

External recognition

The Bedford College Group was awarded the Gold accolade for its LGBTQ+ inclusion work in education by Stonewall. The Group has been a Stonewall school champion since 2018 and previously won the Bronze and Silver standard accreditations.

This upgrade to Gold demonstrates the commitment of management, staff and students to make The Bedford College Group the 'Gold standard' for our wider communities when it comes to inclusivity. It is a recognition for our work to make the Group a place for study and work where everyone can enjoy a sense of belonging and can access with equal ease and dignity. We strive to ensure that in our LGBT+ friendly community everyone feels welcomed and safe to be themselves, and can live their life to the full.

In the report Stonewall said:

"Wow! There is some fantastic evidence in these materials. Your policies are clear and comprehensive and it's wonderful to see the range of different policies, documents and display materials that help to communicate and reinforce your messaging …"

"Overall, this is a really strong application across all of the areas of good practice, with particularly good work around learner voice and staff training. It's fantastic to see how seriously you take your ongoing commitment to this work."

Stonewall SCHOOL & COLLEGE CHAMPION AWARDS GOLD 2021/23

3. Performance against our equality priorities

This section of the report summarises the progress against our equality measures which are outlined in the Single Equality Scheme (2018-2022).

Equality objective 1: Improve headline achievement rates for disability and ethnicity

1. Improve achievement for learners with a disability on full-time programmes to reduce difference to no more than 1% in comparison to achievement of learners with no disability

Outcome: In 2020/21 the achievement gap between learners with a disability and no disability has widen to -4.1%, which is greater than the gap in previous years (under -2%).

2. Improve achievement for High Needs learners so there is no difference in comparison to achievement for full-time 16-18 learners

Outcome: Students with high needs achieved as well as students without these needs in their main programme (87% HNS). However, a high proportion of HNS undertook Functional Skills in 20-21 and this has resulted in lower achievement rates overall when compared to those without.

3. Improve achievement for learners from minority ethnic groups on full-time programmes to reduce different outcomes by ethnicity to no more than 4% between the White British and the individual ethnic categories

Outcome: By individual ethnicities, the ethnic groups with a wider achievement gap than the equality measure of -4% were Gypsies/Irish Travellers at -7.6%, Other dual/multiple heritage at -4.9% and White and Black African at -4.8%, which was similar to the position in the previous year.

4. Improve timely achievement for apprentices from minority ethnic groups to reduce different outcomes by ethnicity to no more than 2% between the White British and the individual ethnic groups

Outcome: In comparison to the White British group, the ethnic groups with a lower achievement were White and Black Caribbean, Irish Travellers, Indian, Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi, however the small numbers of enrolments in these groups of apprentices makes conclusions for individual ethnic groups not viable.

Equality objective 2: Ensure the safety and well-being of students across all protected characteristics

1. The rates for recorded bullying incidents are comparable for all protected characteristics.

Outcome: The results from the Spring Survey and the monitoring of bullying incidents indicate that the instances of identity-based bullying were rare, while there was average satisfaction with the way the College dealt with bullying issues in general.

2. The rates for disciplinary actions (academic and behaviour) are comparable for disability-no disability, ethnic groups, and males-females.

Outcome: At top level, the recorded disciplinary actions by disability, gender and ethnicity were broadly proportional with the overall student demographics for these protected characteristics.

3. The student satisfaction rates for feeling safe, as evidenced through student surveys, are comparable for students across all protected characteristics.

Outcome: The student feedback shows a good level of satisfaction for feeling safe, and for being treated fairly and with respect. Overall, the BCG is perceived as a welcoming and friendly place towards all learners regardless of who the people are or where they come from.

Equality objective 3: Improve the data monitoring of our workforce to ensure advancing equality of opportunity

1. 95% of all staff records on iTrent are with completed personal information section incl. the 'prefer not to say' option.

Outcome: 100% of staff have provided either some or all their personal data, including people who have opted out for specific individual characteristics e.g. for sexual orientation or religion.

2. The staff recruitment stages (application-shortlisting-interview-offer) are monitored for the range of protected characteristics.

Outcome: We have a reporting system for monitoring the staff recruitment stages and have identified areas for improvement to ensure fairness and equitable outcomes for the protected characteristics.

3. The staff exit reviews are monitored for issues in relation to the protected characteristics.

Outcome: We have launched a new exit survey and are monitoring for potential trends in staff's experience in relation to EDI.

Race Equality Action Plan (2020-2023)
In addition to the Single Equality Scheme action plan, the College Executive approved a Race Equality Action Plan and set up a working group to lead on individual actions.
Complete actions regarding staff
- We proactively monitor all stages of the recruitment process and have identified areas for interventions in year two of the plan to ensure fair and unbiased process and decision-making.
- We monitor the exit stage of employment for disparities.
- We have a staff Race Equality Forum and the HR and Executive are acting on the feedback from the forum.
- We have launched a telephone system for anonymous reporting of harassment, discrimination, hate incidents or other undesirable behaviour.

Completed actions regarding students
- We have established a student support group Race and Culture and have student reps for Race and Culture.
- We have launched a Report and Support online system for reporting of harassment, discrimination, hate incidents or other undesirable behaviour.
- We monitor the students' satisfaction and experience for different groups of students including by ethnic background and address areas of concern accordingly.