



## John Graham Construction Ltd: Developing a company-wide approach to Fairness, Inclusion and Respect (FIR)

### BACKGROUND

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John Graham Construction Ltd is national contractor, based in Hillsborough, Northern Ireland, which employees around 1750 people. It was founded over 200 years ago and has regional offices, in England, Scotland and Ireland.

The Group has three companies; Construction (GRAHAM Construction), Asset Management (GRAHAM Asset Management Limited) and Investment's (GRAHAM Investment Projects Limited). More information is available on the company's website [www.graham.co.uk](http://www.graham.co.uk)

Recent projects include:

- Tennison Road Bridge, Croydon, for Network Rail
- Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation, for University of Edinburgh
- The Piece Hall, Halifax, for Calderdale Council
- Immingham Renewable Fuels Terminal, Immingham, for Associated British Ports
- Lews Castle Museum and Archive, Stornoway, for Comhairle nan Eilean siar
- A138 Chelmer Viaduct, Chelmsford, for Highways England

### WHY PROGRESS FIR?

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- ✓ To be an employer of choice
- ✓ To encourage a variety of new ideas within the business, that align with a key corporate value of innovation
- ✓ To better enable the business to:
  - recognise everyone as an individual and support them to do their best
  - value all its people, because when an individual feels valued both their contribution and engagement increases. There is a direct correlation between increased engagement and business performance all of which aligns to the business' corporate values of openness, respect and performance
- ✓ To secure future business success; the war for talent and predicted industry skills shortages means that future success will be dependent on reaching out to and successfully integrating entrants from diverse groups

### WHAT GRAHAM HAS DONE

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GRAHAM is a family-owned company and has always prioritised the fair and supportive treatment of its workforce and so values of equality and diversity have long been embedded within the company, driven from the top leadership team.

The company established a project team to take forward the FIR agenda. This comprised GRAHAM's Head of HR and two Community Engagement Managers, who are FIR practitioner specialists. The project team decided to use the [Be Fair Framework](#) as a tool for benchmarking, development and action planning.

After much work, the company was, in 2013, awarded Be Fair Framework Bronze level in Scotland, then in 2015 this was achieved across all regions of business. In the same year the company was assessed as having advanced from Bronze (in 2013) to Gold level in Investors in People. In 2015, Highways England undertook a StART Assessment of GRAHAM, with the company scoring very highly in the FIR dimension– however the company still wants to do better!

GRAHAM's success has been driven by a number of key initiatives:

- The company moved its focus to delivering ‘Fairness, Inclusion and Respect’, which includes, but goes above and beyond, ‘equality and diversity’
- Strategy has been aligned with key external influencers – particularly the FIR ambition of major clients
- Robust, regular internal FIR audit processes have been established.
- All managers have attended specialist FIR workshops and a number volunteered to participate in the ILM Level r 4 Managing Equality and Diversity Award
- A clear, standardised implementation guidance manual for managers has been produced
- FIR has been integrated into inductions
- An innovative approach to collecting and monitoring diversity has been piloted
- A network of FIR Champions has been established
- The FIR project team has been expanded to include the business’ Training Co-ordinator and specialist FIR practitioners

### **FIR Champions**

GRAHAM has created the role of FIR Champion. Each FIR Champion is supported by one of GRAHAM’s FIR practitioner specialists. The practitioner visits the site, checks systems and logs, and helps the FIR Champion to put processes in place to meet FIR objectives. They act as advisors and mentors to help the FIR Champion in their day to day work.

Workers on site are introduced to and given the contact details of their FIR Champion – at time of induction and information is displayed on posters and other material on the site. They are invited to refer any issues, confidentially to them.

There are boundaries to the FIR Champions’ responsibilities. They might, for example, intervene to solve a problem such as inadequate supply of toilet roll in welfare facilities. But if they are asked to deal with complaints about unfair pay or paygrades, they are supported, by the practitioner, to refer this to a line manager.

Some FIR Champions are graduates and their FIR role assists their development and future prospects.

GRAHAM’s Training Co-ordinator is planning, during 2016, to bring all the FIR Champions together into a structured half day workshop, to build capacity and share learning. This has the potential to develop into a best practice group.

### **Diversity monitoring**

GRAHAM recognises that clients increasingly want diversity data to be collected and reported by their supply chain partners.

A demographic form has been developed and piloted on a typical construction site. This asks workers for information about their gender (including consideration of trans identity), age bracket, race, sexual orientation and any disability.

Particular care has been taken to explain to people *why* the form is being used, and to provide more than one way for people to anonymously return the form.

Rates of return in the pilot have been very high; 100% of the total workforce has completed their forms during induction. The percentage of people declaring particular protected characteristics is much higher than industry benchmark percentages. This indicates that people are comfortable completing the form and also, perhaps, that they are more comfortable ‘being themselves’ on the pilot site than is the norm within construction.

GRAHAM will now use this approach to capture comprehensive data from across their business and sites. They will only report, however, at company level. This is to ensure confidentiality of all individuals.

### **Using the Be Fair Framework**

Using the Be Fair Framework has enabled GRAHAM to benchmark its process and performance against national standards and to be recognised for excellence in delivery. The Framework provided a clear assessment process with pathways to future development and goals and 'stretch' improvement.

The company learnt that success can only be achieved in partnership; GRAHAM made positive use of advice and support from clients and industry organisations.

The key success factor for Be Fair is that it has been developed by the industry - managers and employees just 'get it'.

GRAHAM has further ambitions to:

- Systematically apply FIR to every project and every supply chain partner
- Monitor and report diversity across the business
- Change culture so that operations take responsibility for driving FIR, supported by HR
- Embed FIR into procurement and supply chain management processes and work with supply chain partners to achieve FIR objectives, together
- Integrate FIR into the skills matrix for every employee, so that everyone – including all managers - always receive appropriate FIR / equality & diversity training
- Become the first construction company on the Stonewall Top 100 Employer list.

## LEADERSHIP

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The Managing Director is the advocate at Board level. The Head of HR is tasked with implementation of FIR objectives.

The company's network of FIR practitioner specialists support FIR and FIR Champions on individual projects and sites. The company works to enable Project Managers to also take responsibility for progressing FIR on their sites and projects and to promote the behaviours that achieve it.

## INVESTMENT

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The company provides, on average, three training days per employee per annum. The training budget provides training not only for FIR but also for nationally recognised management qualifications, upskilling of the workforce to level 5 of the QCF (Qualifications and Credit Framework) and professional qualifications such as membership of CIOB, ICE and RICS.

With regard to specific investment in FIR, considerable investment has been made in employee and FIR Champion learning. A development programme was established with an external consultancy. Select managers also received additional, nationally accredited FIR training. Training has been embedded to be self-sustaining, with new managers being mentored by FIR practitioner specialists to ensure future cost efficiencies.

## IMPACT & BENEFIT

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1. Business growth
  - a. An innovative approach to FIR, including use of the Be Fair Framework has allowed GRAHAM to win work with new clients of over £300m.
2. Employee recruitment and retention:
  - a. Staff turnover has reduced even as the business has grown; since 2010 the GRAHAM team has grown by over 47% while retaining a voluntary employee turnover figure of 9% (the National Mean Voluntary Resignation Rate in 2012 was 10.6%).
3. Employee engagement
  - a. Employee engagement has increased by 13% over a 5 year period, with a 100% reduction in staff absenteeism rates.

- b. The organisation has seen a reduction in tribunal cases to zero over a 5 year period and maintains never having had a case regarding FIR.
- 4. There has been a reduction in staff turnover of 3% against a challenging 100% staff growth and a volatile market.
- 5. Recruitment from diverse groups has increased by 5% in a 2 year period and, most significantly, by 35% for graduate applications.
- 6. Our employee engagement survey has shown an increase of 10% on the FIR specific indicator.
- 7. There has also been a quantifiable improvement in the people management skills of managers (engagement survey increase of 15% over 5 years)
- 8. Progressing FIR has developed stronger relationships with clients and with supply chain. This, in turn, has re-enforced leadership commitment to FIR.
- 9. National exposure as a pioneer of FIR has allowed GRAHAM to influence industry policy making, for example through membership of industry-led working groups such as the CECA FIR steering group.
- 10. The company's reputation has been enhanced through national exposure, via the Equality & Human Rights Commission, trade press and support for Skills Development Scotland's SME programme.

## **GREATEST CHALLENGES & OVERCOMING THEM**

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### **Communication**

Sometimes teams can inadvertently work in 'silos'. GRAHAM is working to encourage better communication between teams because this enables objectives to be met more easily. Good cross-team working also makes audits easier to complete, as information can be accessed more quickly and easily.

Corporate communication can be particularly difficult with employees who are working away from home and on different sites. GRAHAM is testing the printing out and posting out of A5 flyers explaining company updates and developments, so that people can read and digest them more easily, for example when travelling.

The company is piloting a move away from annual appraisals, to a more frequent and regular system of line manager/ employee interactions, which will allow corporate developments to be more quickly integrated into work plans.

### **Making adjustments for disability and impairment**

GRAHAM's approach to FIR includes, of course, making reasonable adjustments for people with disability, impairment and particular need.

Partners and supply chain partners sometimes do not inform GRAHAM of individuals' specific needs. Managers, in particular, are being upskilled so that they can spot and make adjustments for needs (e.g. autism – which is 'invisible') so that people are better able to give their best, and be happier at work.

### **Resources for use on site**

There are relatively few materials available to promote and explain FIR on site (e.g. posters, leaflets etc.). GRAHAM is working with the FIR project that has created this case study in order to develop and distribute useful materials.

### **People and projects**

Civil projects, in particular, must be finished on time and on budget. There is a risk that by focusing on project, the needs of people might be overlooked. FIR Champions and strong FIR leadership are key to making sure that the needs of people are not overlooked.

## **TIPS**

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GRAHAM has learnt that achieving buy in from all levels of the organisation is vital. Securing this becomes easier as leadership and management begin to see the benefit – for example through better relationships with clients, improved staff retention and higher quality candidates for vacancies.

It is important to communicate what you are doing and why, with a long term plan but achievable short term goals.

Success came from being honest with staff as to where the company is on the FIR journey and ensuring that everyone recognises the clear link between FIR and company values.

It's beneficial to establish a 'competitive' element to achievement of FIR across sites. Use of the Be Fair Framework has become a normal project process for GRAHAM as a result of this. It results in consistently high levels of enthusiasm from all levels of staff and managers.

The core message is simply "stick at it - FIR is the future business differentiator".

<p>Part funded by:</p> 	<p>This project has been delivered with support from the CITB Growth Fund, which aims to ensure that the construction industry has the right people, with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time and is equipped to meet the future skills demands of the industry.</p>
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