

Date & Time: Tuesday, 24th February 2026 | 10:00 – 12:00

Location: Online - Zoom

Attendees: Ambrose Quashie (HS2), Belinda Blake (National Highways), Christina Scant (Core Highways), Danielle Folkard (Berkeley Group), Ella Anderson (Mace Group), Hollie Cregan (Graham), Kim Kerr (Hilti GB), Kim Thomson (Kier Ltd), Lorna Brown-Owens (Network Rail), Peter Ball (VGC Group), Rebecca Young (HS2), Ruairi Coffey (L Lynch) and Shari Lewison-Frisch (Kapsch TrafficCom Ltd).

School Staff: Dana James-Edwards (Chair), Elizabeth Baidoo, Philip Carter, Sara Gouveia, Saira Khan and Nick Hoar.

ACTIONS:

- **Action 365:** FIR team to follow up with Steering Group members who offered volunteer support across the upcoming training sessions presented for FY26-27.
- **Action 366:** FIR team to circulate updated FIR Survey questions with the Steering Group before distribution.
- **Action 367:** FIR Ambassadors on the Steering Group to contact the FIR team if they wish to join the April "Ask a FIR Ambassador" peer session panel.
- **Action 368:** FIR team to review and update the commercial model and Ambassador journey based on Steering Group breakout feedback.

1. Welcome & Introductions

Dana welcomed attendees, noted apologies and outlined the agenda for the day.

2. Kudos

Dana acknowledged the collective efforts of the Steering Group. Members were thanked for contributing to and signing industry letters to the CITB in response to funding developments. While the outcome was not as hoped, the unified industry response was appreciated by members of the FIR Team. Appreciation was also extended to those who attended the Diversity Data Benchmarking Conference, with special recognition for Shari for representing smaller businesses on the panel at the event. Belinda received thanks for providing detailed feedback on the Diversity Data Benchmarking Report. Hollie was recognised for supporting the inclusion of three Graham sites in the Black Hats pilot and, alongside Belinda, for attending the recent FIR Ambassador meetup in Birmingham, supporting engagement with FIR Ambassadors.

3. CITB Contract Performance Update

An update was provided on the 2024–2026 contract with the CITB, which is due to conclude at the end of March 2026. The programme is significantly overachieving in key areas, including the number of unique companies trained, engagement with micro and SME businesses, and the total number of training interventions delivered, exceeding targets by more than 13,000. Two areas fall below target: the inclusive recruitment module, where only completions meeting specific CITB eligibility criteria count toward the measure, and the number of case studies produced against the contracted requirement. Overall, the contract is expected to conclude on a strong note.

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4. Black Hats Pilot Update

An update on the Black Hats app and pilot rollout was provided. User Acceptance Testing has been completed, and all 13 learning modules are now live in the app. Posters and flyers have been developed, and the pilot has formally begun.

Each participating site is required to complete an Intro to FIR session with site leadership and nominate a minimum of two FIR Ambassadors to ensure leadership understanding and on-site support before app rollout. Ten of the 24 pilot sites are currently progressing, with a further year available to complete rollout across all 24 sites that are funded for the pilot. The initial phase focuses on trusted partner organisations to allow for testing, learning, and refinement. There is a waiting list exceeding 24 sites, reflecting strong industry interest.

5. 2026 Diversity Data Benchmarking Conference

Strong positive feedback was received, with data quality, venue, networking exercises and content all highlighted. Sketch notes were among the most shared social media content in the past 12 months. Development areas for next year include more time for table discussions, an opportunity to interrogate data during presentations, review of speaker selection, and venue logistics. A key theme emerging from feedback is that attendees want more of the 'why' behind the data, not just the 'what'. This will inform both the 2027 event and the FIR Culture and Impact Survey redesign. A Diversity Data Working Group review of the conference is scheduled for 25 February.

6. Steering Group Webpage

The FIR Steering Group webpage is being rebuilt to include member photos and bios. Technical work is underway. Members wishing to be more closely involved in the design and content are invited to make contact with the FIR team.

7. FIR Programme Plan 2026–2027

A. Inspiring Change Conference 2026

The Inspiring Change Conference is confirmed for Tuesday 23 June in Birmingham, with capacity for approximately 105 attendees. Award nominations open on 2 March. Speakers willing to present pro bono are encouraged to contact the FIR team. Lorna volunteered to lead a session.

B. (“How-To” Sessions)

The programme is pivoting from 'what is' FIR content to 'how to' sessions, with a target of 10 such sessions in the coming financial year. Sessions already running or confirmed include:

Month (26-27)	“How-To Session”
January	How to build a 2026 FIR plan
February	Diversity Data Benchmarking Top 10 Insights Next steps for FIR Ambassadors
March	IWD 2026: How to keep women in construction How to make your organisation diabetes safe
April	How to get buy-in and make the business case for FIR

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May	- Understanding the Employment Act 2025 - How to design a diversity survey that works and get people to share their data
June	How to make organisations inclusive for LGBTQ+
July	How to tackle sexual harassment in accordance with the new law
August	How to confidently call out discrimination
September	How to best present your FIR activity to win work
October	- How to navigate difficult conversations - How to facilitate impactful employee networks
November	How to set up an impactful ex-offender programme
December	How to build your 2027 plan for FIR
January	How To Support Your Muslim Colleagues During Ramadan
February	How to defend FIR in the face of backlash
March	How FIR links to health and safety

Volunteer support from Steering Group members was noted across several of the sessions above and Dana will follow up on support available to structure these sessions across the year. Dana emphasised taking advantage of opportunities that arise, such as partnerships with external organisations like 'Diabetes Safety' and 'Muslims in Construction', and building sessions based on both industry needs and ambassador input.

8. FIR Culture and Impact Survey Update

The annual combined survey is being split into two separate entities:

- A short FIR Impact Survey for those who have engaged with the programme in the last 18 months, to be distributed by direct email from April 2026.
- A FIR Culture Survey open to the wider industry, to be aligned with the DD Benchmarking Survey timeline so that both datasets can be presented together at the conference.

The aim is to present the 'what' and 'why' of industry experience at the same event. Members welcomed the change, noting the existing survey was too long and that aligning culture data with benchmarking had long been a goal. It was confirmed that the culture survey questions will be updated to better capture the 'why'; a parallel initiative at National Highways will inform this work, and the revised question set will be shared with the steering group before distribution.

9. FIR Ambassador Programme Update

A series of FIR Ambassador meetups has run: virtual (December), Birmingham (5 February) and London (5 March). Feedback has been very positive and demand for more events is clear. Future cadence and hosting are to be considered.

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Additionally, the 'Becoming a FIR Ambassador' training course is being shortened and simplified, with a relaunch planned for April 2026. 'Next Steps for FIR Ambassador' sessions are also being relaunched and revamped; the first session taking place on 25 February, and interest from partners requesting bespoke internal delivery has already emerged.

A new 'Ask a FIR Ambassador' peer session is planned for April, where experienced FIR Ambassadors will be available to answer questions from newer members. Steering group members who are FIR Ambassadors and wish to join the panel should contact the FIR team.

10. Working Session: FIR Commercial Model

Breakout groups discussed the proposed commercial model and provided strategic feedback. Feedback was consolidated and shared with the group.

Key Themes

Clarity and Value Proposition

- The group reflected that the current market's appetite is for targeted, high-value consultancy (particularly senior leadership) and questioned why this was not the offer to market instead of the modelled tiers presented.
- Any model used to solve business problems should drive success by helping organisations increase competitiveness, win more work, and enhance their social value impact.
- Policy review as a paid offer was questioned given AI tools and free resources (e.g. ACAS) which now cover this ground.
- The helpline risks becoming an HR/legal service, which carries quality and liability implications.
- Any model should be less dependent on the FIR Ambassador Network, as organisations early in their journey, or with few FIR Ambassadors, may not see its value.

Pricing and Tiers

- The presented tier structure was considered overly complex, with too many levels and too many activity components per level.
- The group expressed concern that SMEs risk being priced out of the model and £1,000 was cited as a more realistic entry point.
- The group also expressed concern that budgets for many organisations are tight as a result of prevailing economic conditions and that coupled with the upcoming increase in the cost of SCSS partnerships across the board, it was unlikely that organisations would be able to pay an additional cost for FIR on top of their SCSS partnership.
- A lower-cost entry option was suggested: a commitment or pledge in exchange for a badge or recognition, without requiring full membership.

Capacity

- The group expressed significant concern that the model increases workload for the team without a clear plan to manage it.

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Accreditation and Procurement

- The group suggested that offering an accreditation could be a better way to increase the flow of funding into the Programme but noted that accreditation only adds value if it carries weight in tender and procurement processes (e.g. HS2 supply chain standards).

Likely Uptake

- Most members stated they would not purchase any of the presented tiers. Where a preference was expressed, it was for the lowest-cost option only, and only if participation was mandated.
- Members also expressed that organic demand of the current model was unlikely and it would be difficult to sell, particularly to SMEs.

Overall, while the group understood the need to solve the funding gap for the FIR Programme, they also felt strongly that the model presented would not be the solution. The group recommended focusing on what has proven most valuable (bespoke consultancy in FIR, expert advice and a potential accreditation model) rather than expanding into untested areas. They also suggested sharpening the value proposition of the Programme by exploring offerings that truly solve problems in the industry like a market offering to either draft, or review drafted social value and FIR sections of bids that would help businesses win more work, or advice and support that would immediately translate to the bottom line. The overall steer was to focus on fewer, higher value market offers rather than attempting to cover too broad a range of services.

If the FIR Programme did decide to move forward with the tiered model, despite the points raised above, the group advised that solid next steps would be simplifying the tier structure, defining capacity and tightening the value proposition.

11. Working Session: FIR Ambassador Journey

Breakout groups reviewed the Ambassador journey and discussed structure, expectations and long-term impact.

Key Themes:

- The three-year minimum to reach Gold does not account for people who are already active and experienced DEI practitioners before joining FIR.
- The model only recognises learning completed through FIR's own school: external CPD and activity is not counted.
- Concerns about overall time commitment, particularly for Ambassadors balancing the programme alongside full-time roles.
- The current Silver and Gold requirements may be overly intensive, with too much emphasis on learning hours rather than impact.
- Bronze remains an appropriate learning-focused entry point, but progression should become more impact-led at higher tiers.
- Greater clarity is needed on the purpose of the Ambassador role and what meaningful success looks like.
- Support for shifting from time-based metrics to evidence of application, influence and measurable outcomes.

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- Resources are not refreshed frequently enough to sustain meaningful ongoing engagement against the current criteria.
- The automated tier-loss mechanism is causing significant frustration, particularly for people returning from career breaks, parental leave, or periods of reduced activity.

Overall, the group encouraged simplifying the structure, clarifying expectations at each level, and ensuring the model balances accessibility with demonstrable industry impact.

12. Upcoming Meeting Dates

- **Wednesday 20 May 2026** | Virtual
- **Wednesday 9 September** | Virtual
- **Wednesday 25 November 2026** | In Person, London