



EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

The Handbook does not form part of your contract of employment, except as required by law. If there is any conflict between the Handbook and your terms and conditions of employment, your personal terms and conditions will take precedence.

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF STEP AHEAD

Step Ahead commenced trading in 1995 with an office in Islington and three staff including Director of Operations, Jackie Bedford. With 10 years' experience within the Recruitment Industry at the time, Jackie Bedford aimed to establish a recruitment service which delivered directly in accordance with the needs and requirements of the customer. Step Ahead's philosophy is based upon listening to and learning from the customer (both candidates and clients) in order to provide bespoke recruitment and placement solutions.

Since its inception, Step Ahead has focused on providing services to the Public and Not-for-Profit sectors and Islington Council became its first key client. Whilst this business was initially won on an informal basis, our contract with Islington rapidly grew as a result of referrals within the authority. One year later, as the result of a formal tender and presentation, we were appointed preferred suppliers to Hackney Council. We quickly developed a reputation for the provision of quality recruitment solutions within our niche market.

In January 1997 the business became a Limited Company (Credentials Limited) and the compliment of staff increased to 6. We became full members of the REC (Recruitment and Employment Confederation) and in line with our quality policy developed our Corporate Mission Statement and a comprehensive staff training and development programme. Later that year DTI Minister, Barbara Roche, presented us an award for "Best Business Practice".

Step Ahead's Holborn Office was opened in January 1999 in response to demand from our Clients who by now included major players in the world of Education.

In 2000 we applied for Investors in People accreditation and as a result of our highly developed training and development programme, following a detailed assessment we received the award immediately. Just a few weeks later we were also accredited with ISO 9002. We have now upgraded our quality accreditation to ISO 9001: 2000.

As a company we are keen to give something back to the community and in 2001 we were official partners in the "Building Bridges to Employment" project (funded by the European Social Fund) working alongside City and Islington College in a training and development programme to help the unemployed and disadvantaged back into the workplace.

In 2001 we were also awarded a commendation in the National Training Awards for our staff training programme which has had a proven positive effect on our service delivery.

In July 2003 we were winners of the Business Link for Excellence Award for our in-house staff training and development programme.

In 2005 we were finalists in the London Excellence Awards under three categories:

- Customer Focus
- Organisational Learning
- People Development

Also in 2005 we were accredited with ISO 14001, the international standard which evaluates organisations' environmental management systems and OHSAS 18001 : 1999, the Health and Safety standard.

In 2006 we received an award from London Borough of Islington for Excellence in Promoting Diversity amongst our own workforce, and the workers we put forward to other organisations.

In February 2007 Step Ahead rolled out SPRINT, a revolutionary web-based temp procurement and management system, to all its clients, giving us a major competitive advantage. SPRINT enables clients to order and authorise temps online and enables temps to enter their timesheets via the internet. The system interfaces with our front of house database system, Aspire, which in turn interfaces with our invoicing and pay rolling system, Tempaid, meaning there is a seamless transfer of data from our clients to us. All invoicing and pay rolling is now 100% accurate and paperless putting Step Ahead at the cutting edge of its industry.

In August 2007 Step Ahead achieved an award for Best Use of Technology, in recognition of its development and use of SPRINT.

In December 2007, as part of its continuing expansion programme, Step Ahead merged both its offices in one larger, more modern premises in Farringdon Road. This gave us the capacity to double our workforce.

In November 2008 Step Ahead was awarded it's first contract to manage the provision of an all-encompassing, national recruitment service, for a major UK charity. This involved the establishment and management of a supply chain comprising over 60 recruitment agencies and managing the provision of temporary, contract and permanent staff services from all sectors.

In February 2009 Step Ahead started a division that specialises in Employment advice and Guidance, with a focus on helping unemployed people from disadvantaged sectors and geographical locations.

In November 2009 Step Ahead achieved a further award for its innovative use of technology.

Step Ahead now has a turnover exceeding £8 million per annum.

Step Ahead specialises in temporary and permanent recruitment in three key sectors:

- Public sector
- Charity and other not-for-profit
- Managed services including local government

We also have key Private Sector and Public/Private Sector Partnership clients.

Our in-depth knowledge of these sectors makes us the clear choice for intelligent, consultative partnerships and conscientious service quality.

Here are just some of the reasons why our customers keep recommending us:

We believe our jobseekers to be very important customers - our lifeblood, and the face of Step Ahead in the workplace. So we make sure everyone benefits from all the encouragement, help and guidance our experienced team can give.

Our consultants are highly skilled, knowledgeable professionals who work together, pooling resources to provide the optimum match of people to jobs in a flexible, customer focussed environment.

Step Ahead intends to build on its success to date by continuing to invest in its staff through extensive training and to ensure their IT Systems remain cutting edge, meaning our customers enjoy a service which is second to none.

MISSION STATEMENT

“Our mission is to be a renowned and trusted name amongst top employers and job-seekers alike; to be synonymous with efficiency, expertise and enterprise; to provide a quality service delivered by fully trained and informed Consultants who actively listen to your needs and are qualified in providing intelligent solutions.

To achieve this we aim to create open, consultative partnerships with our Clients and Candidates whilst maintaining an honest and professional approach at all times. As a team we are ethical yet innovative; focused yet flexible; realistic yet enterprising.

We believe in earning our success with you to create yours.”

This mission statement is more than just words; it is the foundation for all business activities and is an integral part of our employees' job descriptions and day-to-day practices.



CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

INTRODUCTION

At Step Ahead we are passionate about what we do – and we are passionate about getting it right!

Step Ahead is committed to providing its current and future customers with a level of service that will at least exceed their expectations. Our standards of practice are endorsed by the achievement of a range of nationally recognised quality standards, which we are proud to promote. These awards endorse the fact that we deliver recruitment services to the highest level and at all times operate in the best interests of our customers. We endeavour to continually improve our quality standards in every aspect of activity. Our philosophy is 'Under Promise, Over Deliver!'

If there is ever the possibility of our high standards not being met, or if you would like to make any suggestions as to how our service can be improved, I would like you to contact me personally to enable us to discuss this on 020 7400 6263 or andy@stepahead.co.uk.

Andy Yiannakou
Director of Quality Services

POLICY STATEMENT

Step Ahead aims to set clear standards of service and to regularly review and improve its performance. Our resources will be used effectively and efficiently in order to provide the highest standard of service to all customers.

Step Ahead will openly provide clear information about its services, which will be easily accessible to everyone who needs them. All enquiries and complaints will be dealt with in a prompt manner.

Step Ahead will make a practice of consulting past, present and potential customers, and their views will be used to continually improve the service provided.

STANDARDS FOR CUSTOMER CARE

Responding to correspondence

Step Ahead will answer all correspondence from the public – including letters, faxes and emails – quickly and clearly

Targets:

- To answer all correspondence within 2 working days.
- To respond to job applications from new candidates via our website using the e-mailed auto-response which explains what happens next
- To use personal corporate signatures at all times.
- To use the e-mail auto response ('Out of Office Assistant') when out of the office stating an alternative colleague's contact details for urgent enquiries.
- To use the corporate recommended font (Arial 11pt or 12pt) at all times
- To use the Step Ahead corporate logo wherever appropriate
- To use corporate templates for letters, faxes, quotes etc.

Appointments

Members of staff will see visitors punctually when an appointment has been made at the office or at an external venue. If no appointment has been made, members of staff will see visitors as promptly as is reasonably possible.

Targets:

- To see visitors within 5 minutes of any appointment that has been made.
- Maximum length of time a person without an appointment should have to wait before they see a representative of Step Ahead is 5 minutes.
- At external meetings members of staff should arrive 10 minutes early, dressed appropriately.
- All employees should carry company business cards at all times.

Answering telephone calls

Each department will answer telephone calls in a fast and professional manner.

Targets:

- To answer calls within 4 rings.
- When transferring calls, ensure that the Step Ahead member of Staff is available to accept the call
- If the staff member is not available, the staff member who takes the call should do everything possible to help the customer
- If a call back is agreed, staff must ensure they call back within the agreed timescale and in any event within the same day

Complaints procedures:

Step Ahead has a defined process for dealing with complaints that must be adhered to by all staff, ensuring that complaints are dealt with efficiently and effectively. All negative comments about our service are immediately reported to the respective direct line manager and to the Director of Quality Services

Targets:

- To have a complaints procedure document available for inspection and delivery to customers.
- To respond to a customer within 24 hours and explain to the customer how the complaint will be dealt with.
- To keep the customer appraised daily on the status of their complaint and the plan and likely timescale for resolution

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

Equal Opportunities in Employment

Step Ahead is committed to preventing discrimination in its employment practices by stimulating genuine equality of opportunity. In order for us to continually monitor the application of our Equal Opportunities Policy, we ask all our candidates to complete our Equal Opportunities Monitoring form at the time of registration.

Step Ahead aims to develop, promote and deliver its services, information and employment opportunities without discriminating on the basis of any aspect of an individual's background or heritage which is used as justification for unfair treatment.

Step Ahead opposes all discrimination on the grounds of colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin or religious beliefs. We are keen to promote good relations in the Community by providing a non-discriminatory service.

We actively deter discrimination on the grounds of sex and counter discrimination against men and women in all employment practices, recognising the demands of child care and the care of other dependants.

Step Ahead ensure that lesbians and gay men will be given the same priority for all jobs as applicants from other groups who are represented in the company.

Disabled applicants will not be barred from selection on the grounds of disability unless arrangements for working with or around the disability cannot reasonably be made.

We value people for their competencies and age is not a consideration when selecting our candidates.

Equal Opportunities Policy

Step Ahead is firmly committed to diversity in all areas of its work and we recognise that we have much to learn and profit from diverse cultures and perspectives; we believe that diversity will make our organisation more effective in meeting the needs of all our clients and candidates.

Step Ahead actively promotes equal opportunities. This applies in the recruitment, selection, training and promotion of all grades of staff employed by the Company and amongst those who use our services – both candidates and employer clients. Promoting equality of opportunity means that everyone is treated solely on the basis of competence and merit, regardless of age, gender, marital status, ethnic, racial or religious or disability considerations, or any other protected status.

All employees are made fully aware that discriminatory acts are treated as gross misconduct. We draw all employees to the Race Relations Codes of Practice and that of the Equal Opportunities Commission, both of which have specific guidance for employment agencies. The relevant sections of the Codes are reproduced as part of this policy and all staff are expected to comply with them.

1. Recruitment, Training and Development

- 1.1. All recruitment and selection, whether internal or external, will be conducted on a non-discriminatory basis and monitored by the Manager.
- 1.2. All training and development services will be planned and executed on a non-discriminatory basis and made available to as many employees as possible.
- 1.3. All promotions will be on a non-discriminatory basis.
- 1.4. No vacancies circulated to employees will contain any directly or indirectly discriminatory statements.
- 1.5. Training in recruitment, selection and appraisal will be provided as widely as possible.
- 1.6. All recruitment materials including application forms will be designed to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity.
- 1.7. Appraisals are intended to form the basis of employee development
- 1.8. Any ability or psychometric testing used in recruitment and selection will be free of bias
- 1.9. Monitoring of recruitment, selection and promotion will be undertaken to assess the success of the policy.

2. Terms and Conditions of Employment

- 2.1. Whilst these may be different for different employees, they will be designed to reflect the policy and to promote it.
- 2.2. All terms and conditions will be continuously reviewed to ensure their alignment with the policy.
- 2.3. Wherever possible, working patterns will be “family friendly”.
- 2.4. The implementation of employment policies that are attractive to people returning to work will be given high priority.

3. Operating Step Ahead’s Service to Candidates and Employer Clients

- 3.1. All dealings with employer clients and job candidates will be conducted in accordance with the Equal Opportunities Policy, as well as the law, and monitored by the manager.
- 3.2. All job vacancies and temporary assignments from employer clients will be accepted and handled on a non-discriminatory basis only.
- 3.3. Appropriate measures will be taken to bring the Policy to the attention of employers, clients and candidates in written communication with them.
- 3.4. All advertising, marketing and promotional material will reflect the Policy.
- 3.5. All pre-selection methods will reflect the Policy.
- 3.6. Step Ahead employees must not make remarks, either verbal or written, which could result in direct or indirect discrimination.

4. Breach of the Policy

- 4.1. Any apparent breach of the Policy by an employee will be dealt with through the Disciplinary Procedure.
- 4.2. Proven discrimination will be treated as gross misconduct.

DIVERSITY POLICY

Different Drums and Different Drummers

If I do not want what you want, please try not to tell me that my want is wrong.

Or if I believe other than you, at least pause before you correct my view.

Or if my emotion is less than yours, or more, given the same circumstances, try not to ask me to feel more strong or weakly.

Or yet if I act, or fail to act, in the manner of your design for action, let me be.

I do not, for the moment at least, ask you to understand me. That will come only when you are willing to give up changing me into a copy of you.

I may be your spouse, your parent, your offspring, your friend or your colleague. If you will allow me any of my own wants, or emotions, or beliefs, or actions, then you open yourself, so that some day these ways of mine might not seem so wrong, and might finally appear to you as right - for me. To put up with me is the first step to understanding me. Not that you embrace my ways as right for you, but that you are no longer irritated or disappointed with me for my seeming waywardness. And in understanding me, you might come to prize my differences from you, and far from seeking to change me, preserve and even nurture those differences.

Extract from:

“Please Understand me II” by David Keirse and Marilyn Bates

Diversity Policy Statement

Step Ahead is firmly committed to diversity in all areas of its work.

We have much to learn and profit from diverse cultures and perspectives, and we believe that diversity will make our organisation more effective in meeting the needs of all our clients and candidates.

Step Ahead aims to develop, promote and deliver its services, information and employment opportunities without discriminating on the basis of a person's race, disability, age, gender, religion, sexuality or any other aspect of an individual's background or heritage which is used as justification for unfair treatment.

Step Ahead has a commitment to be an organisation that:

- Develops services to achieve equality and diversity in all its activities;
- Endeavours to have a workforce generally reflecting the population;
- Understands how valuing diversity can improve our ability to deliver better services;
- Actively consults with different individuals and communities to ensure that services which are provided are responsive and reflect the diversity of need;
- Provides all employees with the training and development they need to enable them to achieve organisational goals;
- Provides a supportive, open environment where all employees have the opportunity to reach their full potential;
- Listens to its customers and involves them in the development of services that recognise and value diversity; and
- Believes that both customers and employees have important parts to play in making this happen.

Diversity Strategies

Overall our Diversity Strategy is to ensure that our Diversity Policy is applied fairly and consistently across the Organisation, as an integral part of the service we provide.

We recognise peoples' differences and aim to ensure that each individual is treated with respect.

To achieve the aims of our overall strategy we will take action to address discrimination, as well as action to promote diversity in employment and service.

The strategies reflect the existing and forthcoming EC and UK legislation and definitions for Equality.

All the specific strategies, actions and outcomes are company-wide and apply to all offices. They should be applied and managed as part of their more detailed Action plans.

Employment

Step Ahead aspires to a diverse workforce which has the skills and understanding to achieve a quality service responsive to individual and customer needs.

As an organisation, we are committed to ensuring that all people are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination. As an employer, we aim to ensure that all employees treat each other with dignity and respect.

We aim to develop a working environment where harassment is unacceptable and where individuals feel confident enough to bring complaints without fearing prejudice. In the unlikely event that harassment occurs, we have strong policies and procedures in place to deal with it.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Provide full and fair consideration to all job applications.
- Require all our employees to undergo relevant training as part of their induction.
- Provide sufficient training and support to meet all our employees' needs in recognising and carrying out their work responsibilities.
- Regularly review our recruitment, selection, training and promotion procedures, ensuring they remain fair and reflect current best practice.

- Maintain records in recruitment, training and employment and use this information to assist in identifying areas of inequality.
- Help all employees to realise their full potential by ensuring they receive fair consideration of their training and career development needs as well as promotion opportunities.
- Whenever possible modify employment practices and procedures to reduce barriers member of disadvantaged social organisations may experience in seeking, and during, employment.
- Develop processes to deal with harassment, bullying and dignity at work which can operate within a safe and open environment.
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

Race

Step Ahead is committed to achieving racial equality. We recognise our duties under the Race Relations Acts and related Codes of Practice and undertake to strive for racial equality both in employment and service provision.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Provide services relevant to people's needs, respecting their cultural and social identities.
- Strive to have a representative workforce that can sensitively address the needs of all communities.
- Work with other organisations to promote racial equality and eliminate racial disadvantage and racial harassment.
- Only accept an environment, which is free from racial harassment and racist behaviour.
- Encourage people from minority communities to take up employment and training opportunities in areas and levels where they are under-represented.
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

Religion

Our strategy is to counter unlawful discrimination and harassment on grounds of religion and belief and to promote good relations between people of different religions and beliefs.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Strive to create an environment which recognises and respects religion and belief.
- Improve the understanding of religion and belief among our staff so that they can sensitively address the needs of individuals and of different faith communities.
- Along with other organisations promote understanding and good relations between people of different faith communities.
- While separate from our Race Strategy, our actions for religion and belief will be broadly similar in principle.
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

Carers

We wish to create an environment where employees, both women and men, are free to share their needs and concerns as carers and are not disadvantaged in the workplace by doing so.

We acknowledge that caring responsibility may include caring for children, a person with a disability and older people.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Work with both men and women to identify the needs of all carers and develop appropriate arrangements to meet those needs.
- Within the constraints of effective service delivery, Step Ahead will make the best possible use of flexible working practices to support carers in our workforce.
- Promote awareness of what flexible working practices are available to support carers.
- Develop an organisational culture, which provides a supportive environment for carers.
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

Gender

Step Ahead is committed to achieving gender equality under the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay legislation and codes of practice and undertake to strive for gender equality in service provision and employment.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Create an environment which is free from harassment and sexist language and behaviour.
- Encourage men and women to take up employment and training opportunities in areas where they are under-represented.
- Set targets to achieve a better gender mix throughout the organisation.
- Work alongside other organisations to promote gender equality.
- Provide flexibility within the working environment which recognise and supports work and home balance requirements (also see Carers strategy).
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

Sexuality

Step Ahead is very aware of the real discrimination that people face due to their sexuality and life choices and we are committed to removing this unfair treatment from our working environment.

We want to create an open environment where Lesbians, Gay men, and Bisexual people feel safe to be open about their sexuality and difference, if they choose to do so.

The organisation will work to make its service accessible to everyone, and ensure that our employment policies and service delivery are not based on the assumption that everyone is heterosexual.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Develop policies and procedures to prohibit unfair treatment of Lesbians, Gay men, and Bisexual staff.
- Provide the same level of service irrespective of any employee's or customer's sexuality.
- Where appropriate, develop services to meet the needs of Lesbians, Gay men and Bisexuals.
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

Disability

Step Ahead recognises that people with a disability are disadvantaged both by an environment and by social attitudes, reflecting the needs of non-disabled people. We are committed to achieving disability equality by, wherever reasonably possible, eliminating both unlawful discrimination on the grounds of disability and the disadvantage experienced by people with a disability. We also recognise that improvements in the operation of our services can reduce the disabilities faced by the disabled.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Recognise our responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, EU Directives and other legislation and will follow the relevant DRC Codes of Practice for employment, premises and services.
- Strive to provide services, which are relevant to the needs of people with disability.
- Try to ensure that all our services and documentation are accessible and available to people with a disability.
- Whenever possible modify our procedures to make full use of an individual's ability and adapt our facilities as necessary to accommodate people with a disability.
- To ensure DDA requirements are met, we shall perform regular "audits" of our premises, services and processes.
- Where needed, provide managers and staff with training in awareness and confidence to support people with a disability.
- Whenever practicable, continue to employ staff who become disabled during their employment, and assist in their re-training.
- Guarantee people with a disability an interview for any employment vacancy for which they meet the minimum essential criteria.
- Provide systems which seek to maximise access to employment by people with a disability.
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

Age

At Step Ahead, we recognise that age discrimination can affect all age groups and both genders, age is no indicator of effectiveness in most work activities and employment decisions should not be based on age alone (with the current exception of retirement ages). We will value people regardless of age and aim to provide services that should be sensitive to the needs of all age groups. We will work to create an environment where people are judged on their talents, skills and experience, rather than on misconceptions and prejudices about age.

As an organisation we are committed to opposing unjustified age discrimination and recognise the need for our own strategy to be in line with the EC Directive (2000/78/EC) and forthcoming UK legislation to be implemented from 2006.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Remove age-related criteria in our employment practices (subject to present retirement ages).
- Regardless of age, provide recruitment, training and promotion on the basis of need.
- Work with organisations to eliminate age discrimination.
- Work to ensure that older workers are able to leave the organisation with dignity and flexibility working arrangements.
- Follow Government guidance on applying the relevant UK legislation.

Cohesion

Step Ahead recognises that it may also need to deal with discrimination against groups not elsewhere covered, in line with existing or forthcoming UK legislation. For example, the review of legislation on employment of ex-offenders, a group which is estimated by the Home Office to cover over a quarter of the working-age population.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Continue to review and progress the organisation's Diversity Policy and Strategies so that they reflect the true diversity of society.

Responsibilities

All staff

All staff will be given full training and support to ensure this policy is put into practice. However, we expect a personal commitment from all employees in making it effective and in setting an exemplary standard for others to follow.

All members of staff will take responsibility to:

- Ensure they understand the values and benefits of equality and diversity;
- Become familiar with this policy, to follow it, and ensure that any staff for whom they are responsible do so as well;
- Draw to the attention of their line manager any instances of apparent discrimination or any perceived problem in relation to employment or to the provision of services.

Directors and Senior Management

The Directors have corporate responsibility for ensuring that this policy underpins all aspects of our work. The Directors are responsible for developing the organisational culture in which this policy can operate effectively and for ensuring that it is implemented.

Directors and Senior Management are individually and corporately responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented in their particular areas of responsibility.

Communication

A copy of our Diversity Policy and Procedures will be available to all staff in the staff handbook. A copy will also be available to clients and candidates via our website.

All our policies, including those relating to Diversity, will be monitored for clarity and plain English.

Other Corporate policies and publications will be monitored to ensure that diversity issues are properly addressed.

Development and review

This policy is designed to encourage practical changes. We therefore expect to update it in the light of experience from applying it in practice and as a result of changes in legislation or our own internal organisation and policies. Such revisions will be notified to all staff through the usual channels.

In addition to annual reviews of all policies, a major and fundamental review of this policy will take place at least every three years.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE SUFFERED DISCRIMINATION OR HARASSMENT

1. If you think you are being harassed or discriminated against it is a good idea to make it clear to the person who is harassing you that their behaviour is unwelcome and that you want it to stop. However, you do not have to do this, particularly if you are feeling bullied or intimidated. If you do choose to address your concerns to the person be clear and assertive but take care that you are not perceived to be bullying the individual. Individuals may find it helpful to ask a friend, colleague, or manager to be with them in a support role.
2. If speaking to the person in question has failed to stop the problem, you should talk to your manager. If it is your manager or supervisor who is harassing you, speak to someone higher up. Your complaint will be dealt with quickly, thoroughly and sympathetically.
3. It is usually best to try and sort things out quickly and as close to the problem as possible. Discrimination can happen accidentally or through thoughtlessness. Harassment can be unintentional. Often, once an individual understands the problem, he or she will be willing to change their behaviour.
4. If your manager is unable to help you, or refuses to help you, you should use the company's grievance procedure. You have a right to be accompanied by a work colleague or suitably qualified trade union representative at any hearing into your grievance.
5. If you are not satisfied with the result of a grievance procedure, you have a right of appeal as detailed in the Grievance Procedure. You have a right to be accompanied by a suitably qualified trade union representative or a work colleague during the appeal hearing.

SUSTAINABILITY POLICY

Social, economic and environmental

Responsibility for a sustainable environment rests with all of us. At Step Ahead we apply exactly the same best practice principles as our clients in the public sector, and have achieved ISO 14001 the international standard for environmental management systems. Step Ahead has also signed up to the UN Global Compact which has ten principles in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption enjoy universal consensus and are derived from:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- The International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work
- The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development
- The United Nations Convention Against Corruption

The Global Compact asks companies to embrace, support and enact, within their sphere of influence, a set of core values in the areas of human rights, labour standards, the environment, and anti-corruption.

We demonstrate our commitment to sustainability by ensuring that every strand of decision making within the company takes account of the potential impact of the choices we make. We have a dedicated sustainability manager on staff, and hold weekly team meetings during which we review our performance in the three key areas of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

As a 'people business' we consider it paramount that every action taken within our organisation has a positive effect on its **people and the community**. Here are just some of the ways we strive to achieve this:

- We ensure that our benefits package for staff is the best in our sector
- Our Employee Handbook is updated regularly to ensure it is current and reflects best employment practice
- Step Ahead promotes a healthy work/life balance including having permanent staff who work part time and from home
- Step Ahead has won a number of awards for its commitment to staff training and development
- We have worked in partnership with local organisations on an ESF project to help get the disadvantaged back into the workplace
- We have effective risk management in place in respect of harm to the vulnerable, security, confidentiality, health, fraud and professional malpractice

Our very existence depends upon maintaining sound **economic sustainability** and we take a number of measures to do this:

- We produce and review management accounts every month
- Suppliers are paid at the end of every month, without fail
- We conduct regular review meeting with our clients to gain feedback on the quality of our service versus our pricing
- We have the highest Dun & Bradstreet rating possible for an organisation of our size

Step Ahead has achieved ISO 14001, the international standard which evaluates organisations' **environmental management** systems. The Directors determine operational procedures and best practices for all key activities, and staff are thoroughly trained in Step Ahead's environmental policies and are expected to:

- Pay particular regard to the minimisation of waste and greenhouse gasses
- Be responsible for reporting environmental observations and suggestions to the sustainability manager

Our ISO 14001 and ISO 9001:2000 processes and adherence are regularly reviewed and subject to annual external audits.

Additionally, we review the environmental performance of our suppliers and sub-contractors as part of the approval process before their appointment, and we have committed major investment in cutting-edge technology, our SPRINT integrated extranet system which minimises waste from paper, toner and electricity.

QUALITY POLICY

Credentials Limited T/A Step Ahead aims to provide defect free goods and services to its customers on time and within budget.

The Organisation operates a Quality Management System that has gained BS EN ISO 9001: 2000 certification, including aspects specific to the provision of high quality recruitment and training services.

The management is committed to:

- Develop and improve the Quality Management System
- Continually improve the effectiveness of the Quality Management System
- The enhancement of customer satisfaction

The management has a continuing commitment to:

- Ensure that customer needs and expectations are determined and fulfilled with the aim of achieving customer satisfaction
- Communicate throughout the Organisation the importance of meeting customer needs and legal requirements
- Establish the Quality Policy and its objectives
- Ensure that the management review meeting sets and reviews the quality objectives, and reports on the Internal audit results as a means of monitoring and measuring the processes and the effectiveness of the Quality Management System
- Ensure the availability of resources

ENVIRONMENT POLICY

Step Ahead is continuously seeking ways in which to help protect the environment.

We achieve this by adhering to the following environmental principles:

- Ensuring that all resources are used efficiently and effectively
- Making purchases which are produced utilising the least environmentally-damaging methods
- Utilising suppliers who contribute to our own environmental objectives
- Recycling waste where possible and re-using materials e.g. paper, toner cartridges, etc
- Actively conserving energy and promoting energy efficiency
- Recognising and responding to climate change issues
- Actively encouraging a “green economy” within our workforce
- Opening offices which are easily accessible via public transport, discouraging staff and visitors to travel by car
- Raising awareness and providing environmental training
- Ensuring that all environmental legislation is complied with or exceeded
- Constantly monitoring environmental performance seeking ways for improvement

SMOKE-FREE POLICY

PURPOSE

This policy has been developed to protect all employees, service users, customers and visitors from exposure to second-hand smoke and to assist compliance with the Health Act 2006.

Exposure to second-hand smoke increases the risk of lung cancer, heart disease and other serious illnesses.

Ventilation or separating smokers and non-smokers within the same airspace does not completely stop potentially dangerous exposure.

POLICY

It is the policy of Step Ahead that all our workplaces are smoke free, and all employees have a right to work in a smoke free environment. Smoking is prohibited in all enclosed and substantially enclosed premises in the workplace.

This includes company vehicles. This policy applies to all employees, consultants, contractors, customers or members and visitors.

IMPLEMENTATION

Overall responsibility for policy implementation and review rests with the Director of Corporate Affairs. However, all staff are obliged to adhere to, and support the implementation of the policy.

The person named above shall inform all existing employees, consultants and contractors of the policy and their role in the implementation and monitoring of the policy. They will also give all new personnel a copy of the policy on recruitment/induction.

Appropriate 'no-smoking' signs will be clearly displayed at the entrances to and within the premises, and in all smoke free vehicles.

NON-COMPLIANCE

Local disciplinary procedures will be followed if a member of staff does not comply with this policy.

Those who do not comply with the smoke free law may also be liable to a fixed penalty fine and possible criminal prosecution.

HELP TO STOP SMOKING

The NHS offers a range of free services to help smokers give up. Visit gosmokefree.co.uk or call the NHS smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169 for details. Alternatively you can text 'give up' and your full postcode to 88088 to find your local NHS stop-smoking service.

HEALTH AND SAFETY STATEMENT AND POLICY

Health and Safety Statement

It is a duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act, for everyone engaged in company activities to exercise responsibility and care in the prevention of injury and ill health to themselves and to others who may be affected by acts and omissions as work. Those who supervise work, at whatever level, have special obligations to ensure that they do not endanger the health and safety of colleagues.

No person shall intentionally interfere with, or misuse anything provided by the company in the interests of health, safety or welfare.

Individuals are required to comply with any rules or requirements made under the authority of this policy.

Health and Safety Policy

To demonstrate the importance we place on Health and Safety, Step Ahead is OHSAS 18001 : 1999 accredited. The Standard requires that the organisation must establish and maintain an OH&S Management System, in accordance with the requirements stated by the standard. We therefore have a comprehensive OH&S Management System, which is defined in our Occupational Health And Safety (OH&S) Management Manual.

Operational control is maintained by the use of procedures contained in:

1. This OH&S Management Manual
2. Risk Assessments
3. Method Statements
4. Quality Management procedures
5. Environmental Management procedures
6. Staff Handbook
7. Handbooks for Temporary Workers
8. Task specific instructions and guidelines

A review of OH&S performance is included in our Management Reviews. This entails reviews of any specific health and safety objectives previously set, as well as the health and safety data and observations available at that time.

All health and safety non-conformances, including details of the corrective and preventive action taken, are recorded on the Organisation's Non-conformance Log as health and safety issues; accidents, incidents and near misses are reported in accordance the requirements of RIDDOR and the Social Security Act 1925. A record is kept in the Accident Book.

Periodical evaluation of compliance with relevant OH&S legislation and regulations is carried out in accordance with the procedures set out in our OH&S Management Manual; in the event of accidents, incidents and near misses, revised or additional Risk Assessments are considered.

A review of the corrective and preventive actions taken to eliminate the causes of actual and potential non-conformances is included in Management Review and an OH&S Management System Audit programme is maintained ensuring that each section of the OH&S Management System is verified at least annually and audits are scheduled reflecting the importance of the processes being audited. The OH&S Management System Audit programme may be revised as a result of non-conformances or Risk Assessments.

The Audit

Wherever possible, audits are conducted by staff independent of those having direct responsibility for the activity being examined. The OH&S Management Manual is checked in order to determine the sections and procedures to be audited.

The Audit Process

- A representative number of records are selected and, the actual records to be audited are randomly selected.
- The staff concerned are informed that an OH&S Management System Audit is being undertaken and any questions they may have regarding the audit are answered.
- The selected records are examined in order to determine whether the procedures identified in 4.5.4.4 of the OH&S Manual were carried out correctly.
- If the procedures were not undertaken correctly, the findings are discussed with the appropriate member of personnel responsible for carrying out the procedure in order to determine the reasons for deviation from the procedures.
- A record of the findings of the audit is kept on an OH&S Management System Audit Checklist in accordance with the requirements of Section 4.5.3 of the OH&S Manual, Records
- The OH&S Management System Audit results are reviewed during the Management Review process described in the OH&S Manual.

All customers are asked to observe and comply with our Health and Safety requirements. Where there are potential Health and Safety risks on a customer site (for example, in the instance of a pregnant worker), our Health and Safety Officer will attend the customer site to carry out a risk assessment and follow the processes defined in our Health and Safety manual.

HEALTH AND SAFETY ARRANGEMENTS FOR FLEXIBLE EMPLOYEES

Step Ahead will:

- Obtain from the client details of specialist skills or qualifications required to carry out an assignment.
- Communicate to you all the information provided by the Client on health and safety which relates to your assignment.
- Require all flexible employees to co-operate with the Client's health and safety policy and practices.
- Maintain accident and near-incident records where appropriate.

As a flexible employee you must:

- Familiarise yourself with the Client's health and safety procedures and conform to them.
- Assess risks to your own health and safety to which you are exposed at work. This extends to reporting any dangers of potential risks to the safety representative or other official of the Client, and your Step Ahead Recruitment Consultant
- Work in a safe manner, taking all reasonable steps to safeguard your own safety and that of any others who may be affected by your actions.
- Report to the Client's safety representative and to your Step Ahead Recruitment Consultant any incidents that may lead or have led to accident or injury.
- Co-operate with the Client on health and safety matters and observe all health and safety instructions and regulations from the Client.
- Wear any protective clothing (or request it if you believe it is necessary) and use any protective equipment you are provided with in order to carry out the assignment
- Observe the Client's health and safety policy at all times, take care to follow safety regulations and be responsible for your own safety and that of those around you.

Clients must:

- Treat Step Ahead's flexible employees as they would their own employees for all health and safety matters, and ensure a safe system of work at all times.
- Assess health and safety risks and record the result of the assessment.
- Provide Step Ahead with information on special qualifications or skills which the flexible employee will need, and on special features of the work if they are likely to affect the health and safety of flexible employees
- Co-operate with Step Ahead flexible employees on health and safety matters

- Provide sufficient training and supervision to ensure a safe working environment.
- Provide any protective clothing or protective equipment necessary for the flexible employee to perform the job safely.
- Tell the flexible employee the name of his or her authorised safety representative with the Client.
- Record any accidents or injuries in their Accident Record Book, investigate the accident and provide copies of any documents to Step Ahead. Step Ahead will, if required, report the accident to comply with the Reporting of Injuries and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations.

HEALTH AND SAFETY ARRANGEMENTS FOR ALL EMPLOYEES

Safety rules, risks and procedures

The Company' general safety rules, risks and procedures relevant to its office environment are listed below. You should make yourself aware of your responsibilities to protect yourself, and ensure you comply with the following rules. Failure to comply will be addressed through the Probationary or Disciplinary Procedure.

Display screen equipment ('DSE')

If you work with a VDU and develop pain, stiffness or numbness which you think is due to your work, tell your Manager without delay.

Electricity and electrical equipment

The Company maintains its electrical systems to prevent danger so far as is reasonably practicable.

Never use electrical equipment if you have reason to suspect it is unsafe.

You should not use equipment if you can see signs of damage, wear or overheating

Get your Manager's permission before you dismantle, repair or modify electrical equipment or fit a mains plug.

Fire

- Learn the fire evacuation procedure
- Respond promptly to fire alarms
- Respect fire safety measures such as clear corridors, closed fire doors and unobstructed exits.
- If you notice smoke or any other sign of a fire, raise the alarm immediately. Only fight the fire if you know how to do it and are sure you will be safe - otherwise evacuate and close doors as you leave.

Good housekeeping

- a) Hygiene
 - No food or drink to be consumed outside kitchen/dining area (except water, or drinks held in covered mugs).
 - All rubbish to be put in waste paper bins – excess to be placed in black bags and placed in designated area.
 - The kitchen is to be kept clean and tidy by employees.

- b) Tidiness for Safety
 - Do not let cables trail to create trip or electrical hazards. If necessary use ties or cable ramps
 - Be careful about putting things on the floor.
 - Never leave things on the stairs.
 - Clear desk policy at the end of the day.

First aid

Familiarise yourself with the arrangements for providing first aid or otherwise dealing with injury.

Accidents and injuries

If you have an accident at work you must immediately tell your Manager, who will complete the accident book for any accident at work involving a person:

- Who is on The Company' premises; and/or
- Who is a The Company employee.

If an accident at work results in an incapacity for work for more than three days (including Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays) your Manager will also complete form F2508 – available from the Chief Executive.

In the case of death, a specified major injury or condition, or a dangerous occurrence:

- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) must be notified immediately (e.g. by telephone)
- A written report must be submitted within seven days, normally by using form F2508.

Copies of all completed F2508 forms are kept by the Chief Executive.

Accident investigation

If there is an accident at work, to investigate we may:

- Interview injured workers and witnesses
- Examine the workplace for factors associated with the accident
- Determine the cause of the accident
- Take corrective action to prevent the accident from recurring
- Recording the findings and actions taken

Hazardous substances

If hazardous chemicals are received on the premises, The Company' receipt of hazard data sheets will be recorded. In these circumstances we will conduct assessments for the processes in which the hazardous substances are used, including who will use them and when they are to be used.

Lone working

You should avoid working alone after regular office hours. If you unavoidably have to work alone, or if a situation could pose a threat to you, your Manager will discuss with you arrangements for maximising safety. These arrangements may vary, depending on the circumstances, but may involve:

- Keeping the door locked at all times
- Not allowing access to anyone you don't know, or anyone who does not have a pre-arranged appointment
- Making sure you are fully aware of emergency procedures, e.g. in the event of a fire
- Not working alone if you have any medical condition which means that it is unsuitable for you to work alone
- Identifying potentially threatening situations in advance, so that the risks can be minimised
- Giving you telephone numbers to contact in an emergency
- Maintaining regular contact with you
- Ensuring that you have access to the first-aid kit

Visiting other places of work

If you visit other places of work on behalf of The Company you must comply fully with any further health and safety rules notified to you. You are responsible for obtaining these rules and complying with them.

Personal protective equipment

We will issue any necessary personal protective equipment to you, and you must use it: this may include helmets and gloves at events. You must not misuse any such equipment.

Risk assessments

We assess and monitor our workplace and operations to ensure that we are aware of any risks to the health and safety of those who may be affected by our activities.

Pregnant workers

If an employee formally informs us that she is pregnant, her Manager will conduct a Maternity Health Assessment (see the Appendix) and implement any necessary reasonable adjustments to accommodate her maternity at work.

Manual handling

We aim to ensure that you do not undertake any manual handling operations at work which involve a risk of injury. Where this is not reasonably practicable, we make an assessment of manual handling operations, and either eliminate the hazard or reduce it to an acceptable level. We also provide you with information, instruction and training as necessary. Make sure you follow these rules when lifting:

If the load is awkward or too heavy for you – get help.

- If a mechanical lifting aid is available and you are trained in its use – use it, or ask someone who is trained to do so.

Before you lift, check:

- Do you have adequate room to lift the object?
- Are there any sharp edges?
- Is there a clear path to your destination?
- Is there adequate room for you to put the object down?

When you are lifting, remember:

- Keep your back straight
- Tuck your chin in
- Keep your feet as close to the load as possible, slightly apart and one foot slightly more forward than the other
- Bend your knees and crouch to the object
- Get a firm grip using your whole hand, not just your fingertips
- Keep your elbows well tucked in
- Lift smoothly and move in a forward direction
- Make sure you can see where you are going at all times
- When you set the load down take care not to trap your fingers.

POLICY ON YOUR RIGHTS REGARDING EYE AND EYESIGHT TESTS

Employees are entitled, but are not obliged to undergo, an appropriate eye and eyesight test:

- If they are a “user” of DSE or
- Upon a change of job or workload that brings them into the definition of a user.

Note: The results of an eyesight test can only be disclosed to the employer with the consent of the employee. (Access to Medical Reports Act 1988.)

Repeat testing must be available at regular intervals, normally in line with the recommendations of the practitioner that carried out the previous test.

An appropriate eye and eyesight test is defined within the Opticians Act 1989 as a “sight test” which should be carried out by a registered ophthalmic optician or suitably qualified medical practitioner.

Where facilities exist an employee may forego the entitlement to a full test, and opt for a less comprehensive test, such as may be carried out in-house on a vision screening instrument by an occupational health nurse. Where this screening indicates a vision defect, the employer is obliged to provide a full eye and eyesight test upon request.

Where special corrective appliances (normally spectacles) are prescribed specifically for work with DSE, it is the “user's” employer that must provide these, regardless of the premises at which the workstation is used. Glasses required for any other purpose are not the employer’s responsibility. The employer is not expected to supply tinted lenses or so-called “VDU glasses” that purport to protect from radiation.

Some people who normally wear glasses may also require special corrective lenses specifically for work with DSE.

The employer has to pay only the basic cost of suitable lenses and frames. Employees who wish to upgrade to designer frames will have to fund the excess cost themselves.

POLICY ON THE USE OF E-MAILS, THE INTERNET AND VOICE-MAILS

The Company attaches great importance to the proper use of e-mails, the internet and voice mails as misuse can lead to personal and company liability as well as introducing destructive viruses into the computer system. Exercise extreme caution in the composition of your messages. To ensure compliance with this policy, the Company will undertake e-mail monitoring and interception pursuant to the Telecommunications (Lawful Business Practice) (Interception of Communications) Regulations 2000. Contravention of the following may result in disciplinary action and possible dismissal:

- Transmission of any material via Step Ahead's network, or use of any part of it, in violation of any UK law or regulation is prohibited. Such prohibited transmission might include, but is not limited to: copyright material, material legally judged to be threatening, obscene, abusive, pornographic, offensive, defamatory, sexist, racist or harassing messages; material protected by trade secret, whether or not the end user was aware of the content of the material or of the relevant law.
- DO NOT under any circumstances view websites which contain abusive, pornographic, offensive, defamatory, sexist, or racist material;
- DO NOT reveal any computer passwords to a third party without proper authority;
- DO NOT send messages from any ASP login other than your own;
- DO NOT send any e-mails that you would not wish a third party to read and do not send trivial or unnecessary messages;
- DO NOT send personal non-work related e-mails and DO NOT use the internet for non-work purposes;
- DO NOT send confidential or commercially sensitive messages via the internet without first obtaining the recipients consent unless encrypted. Always include our standard confidentiality notice in the message;
- DO NOT download software, programmes, music or other content from the internet other than for work purposes and always check with a Director first to avoid corrupting our system;
- DO NOT enter into any contractual or make representations without first having obtained the necessary authority;
- ALWAYS make hard copies of e-mails where necessary for record purposes. Remember that e-mails are disclosable documents in legal proceedings;
- ALWAYS obtain confirmation receipts for important e-mails.

TRAVEL AND SUBSISTENCE (TAS) ALLOWANCES FOR FLEXIBLE EMPLOYEES

Through Step Ahead's Travel and Subsistence (TAS) scheme you may be eligible to receive a payment of your travel and subsistence expenses, which will not be subject to the deduction of tax and National Insurance (NI), meaning your weekly net pay can increase. Step Ahead will assess your eligibility for the TAS scheme each week based on information supplied to us by you regarding the expenses you have incurred for travel to your assignment and subsistence costs, based on HMRC-approved eligibility criteria.

Under the TAS scheme you must be mobile and flexible in the location of your assignments, and you must not be expected to be assigned to one work location for either all of your employment with Step Ahead, or for a period exceeding 24 months.

You must keep receipts for travel your business travel expenditure (including expenditure incurred for journeys to and from your assignments) and you must be prepared to produce these receipts upon request by Step Ahead or HMRC.

In taking part in the TAS scheme you agree that some of your gross taxable pay will be reduced, under a salary-sacrifice scheme. After this reduction, the addition of your tax-free and NI-free TAS allowance means that your take-home pay can increase. The level of benefit paid will be calculated in accordance with the HMRC-approved limits, and your individual circumstances. For each assignment that you perform the amount of your allowances will be calculated automatically by Step Ahead, and resultant allowance will be paid to you free of tax and National Insurance. We will deduct from any allowances a small amount towards the administration of the scheme however, you will always be financially better off than if you didn't take part in the scheme. If the calculation determines that there would be a detriment to your take-home pay as a result of this arrangement, no salary sacrifice will be applied.

You may not benefit from the TAS scheme if you do not regularly pay tax and National Insurance. Flexible Employees earning the National Minimum Wage rate on all hours will not benefit from the scheme. Through the scheme, the value of the sacrifice cannot reduce your gross taxable pay below the National Minimum Wage.

Where an allowance is paid your payslip will show the increase in net pay as a result of being in the TAS scheme. Step Ahead reserves the right not to pay the allowance, and to amend, vary or withdraw the TAS scheme at any time; you will be informed of any changes in writing.

Should you wish to opt out of the TAS Scheme you may do so at any time during the first four weeks of your employment. Thereafter you agree to remain in the Scheme for a renewable period of 12 months or until your employment with Step Ahead terminates. If you wish to opt back into the scheme you must wait 12 months from the time that you decide to opt out.

If as a result of an exceptional event such as marriage, the birth of a child, a house move, or disablement you wish to opt in or out of the scheme outside the above arrangements, please speak with your Recruitment Consultant.

To withdraw from or join the scheme for any reason you must complete an opt-in or opt-out form.

For further details please speak with your Recruitment Consultant.

MOBILE PHONE POLICY

Legislation for all Mobile Phone Users

The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 2003 make it a criminal offence to use a hand-held mobile phone while driving a motor vehicle.

To ensure that Step Ahead as an organisation and all employees comply with this law, mobile phone **MUST** be switched off whilst driving on company business.

The only exceptions to this are:-

- genuine emergency calls to the ambulance, fire or police services via 112 or 999 when it is unsafe or impracticable to cease driving in order to make the call
- completely hands-free equipment is used. For the purpose of this act, hands-free equipment means at no point should the device be held during the course of making or receiving a call or performing any other interactive communication function.

Agreement for Company Mobile Phone Users

Some employees will be provided with a mobile telephone to assist them in their duties. The phone shall remain the property of the company at all times and should be used primarily for business purposes.

The company will pay an agreed sum up to a maximum of £50 per month towards the line rental and cost of calls. For bills exceeding this sum the balance between the agreed sum and the total bill will be deducted from the respective employee's monthly salary payment.

COMPANY CAR POLICY

Some employees will be provided with a company car to assist them in their duties. The Company will supply a motor car to the Employee on the following conditions:

- The Company will keep the registration book of the car at its offices.
- The Company will pay the road fund licence.
- The Company has a fully comprehensive insurance policy including third-party risks. However the Company bears the risk of the first £350 of any expense or damage and it reserves the right to claim this sum from the Employee by deducting it from his/her salary should he/she be involved in an accident for which he/she is to blame or for which the £350 excess is non-recoverable.
- The Employee may not exceed a total mileage of 10,000 per annum, commencing at the date of delivery of the vehicle to the Employee. In the event that the mileage limit of 10,000 per annum is exceeded, the Employee will be liable to reimburse the company the “excess mileage charge” incurred by the company which will be deducted from the Employee’s salary.
- The Employee will arrange for the car to be properly serviced in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions at an approved garage. The Company will where applicable refund to the Employee the cost of such servicing except for the cost of extras.
- The car will be driven exclusively by the Employee and may not be driven by any other driver without the written permission of the Company.
- The car may not be taken outside the UK without the written consent of the company.
- The Employee will be entitled to use the car for private purposes and undertakes not to submit the car to undue wear and tear. The Employee shall comply with all relevant provisions of the insurance policy relating to the car.
- The Employee should immediately report in writing to the Company any accident or damage to the car.
- The Company will pay for petrol and oil used for business mileage only. This does not include travel from home to the office. Claims for petrol and oil should be accompanied by a VAT voucher and should equate with the actual business mileage covered (e.g. a business trip of 20 miles does not warrant a tank full of petrol).
- The Company will not be liable for any fines which the Employee may suffer in respect of the car or the use of it. Should his/her licence be

endorsed as a result of a motoring offence, he/she must immediately report this to the Company in writing.

- In the case of parking fines the Company will pay on the Employee's behalf fines he/she has incurred but will deduct any such amounts from his/her salary along with an administration fee of £10.00.
- Should the Employee cease to work for the Company, he/she must return the car in good condition to the Company together with all keys and documentation (e.g. handbook) on or before the last day of employment to the location specified by the Directors of the Company.
- The provisions above shall also apply if the Employee is absent by reason of sickness in excess of 20 working days (this does not apply in the instance of maternity leave), at the sole discretion of the Company.
- If the Employee takes maternity leave she will be entitled to use the car throughout her maternity leave period.

LAPTOP COMPUTER POLICY

To assist with duties, some employees will be provided with a laptop computer which should be used exclusively for business purposes. The computer, all peripherals and all software remain the property of the company at all times.

Whilst it is agreed that the employee may use the computer and peripherals at home for business purposes, you must ensure that it is available at all times during business hours to other members of staff and the Directors for use in making presentations to clients.

The employee alone is responsible for the safe-keeping of the computer. This means that the employee must ensure that the laptop is never left unattended and that when not in use and outside office hours it is either safely locked away in company premises or in a secure place at the employee's home. The employee's attention is drawn to the fact that if the computer is stolen or damaged whilst left unattended in a motor vehicle it is not insured. In these circumstances the full replacement cost will be deducted from the employee's wages.

Please note that the Company Policy on the Use of E-Mails, The Internet and Voice-Mails remains in force regarding the use of this equipment.

COMPANY CREDIT CARD POLICY

Entirely at the discretion of the Company you may be issued with a Company Credit / Charge Card, which shall remain the property of the Company at all times. The use of this card is solely for the purposes of pre-approved business expenditure to a maximum value £500.00. The Company Card must not be used for personal expenditure under any circumstances. If the company card is used for personal expenditure the Company reserves the right to deduct the corresponding amount of money from your next monthly salary payment.

If you are issued with Company Credit / Charge Card there are only TWO cases where pre-approval for expenditure is not required from the Directors:

- To pay for a standard return train ticket from any London railway station to Gatwick Airport railway station (direct); and
- to pay for a return taxi fare between Gatwick Airport and the Company's West Sussex office

DISASTER RECOVERY

In the event of a “force majeure” in any Step Ahead Branch Office, bearing in mind that we run a Virtual Network (offsite servers accessible over the internet) the respective staff in the first instance would be rehoused in the next nearest Branch Office. In the unlikely event that a force majeure affected all Step Ahead Branch Offices, staff would in the first instance be required to work from home or the nearest location that has internet access until notified of their temporary accommodation (within 24 hours). Managers and support staff would be required to report to our West Sussex Administration Centre where they will have access to the company network. This will ensure all accounting processes (such as temporaries' payroll, client invoicing etc) can continue seamlessly.

Computer Systems

The company's servers are situated in a secure commercial data centre in London Docklands and are mirrored and backed up every day and a copy of our data is held off-site. This means that in the unlikely event of a complete server failure, Step Ahead systems would be up and running again within a maximum of 4 hours.

Team Work

At Step Ahead, the emphasis is on teamwork. Each client organisation has an Account Handler/Manager who is that organisations main point of a contact for the account. The Account Handler/Manager is responsible for the day-to-day handling of the account; however the whole team backs him/her up. This ensures that each client organisation can be assured that all Step Ahead staff are briefed about the contractual and day to day requirements.

At Step Ahead we run a Virtual Network and all staff have access to our fully integrated database and internal and external e-mail systems ensuring optimum resources are available to all staff at all times. In the event therefore that a respective client's Account Manager is unexpectedly unavailable (due to a personal emergency) another Consultant, Manager or Director is able to step in and provide that client with total continuity of service.

Insurance

Step Ahead has a fully comprehensive range of insurances in the event that the unexpected occurs. We will be pleased to provide specific details of our policies if required.

POLICY STATEMENT ON THE RECRUITMENT OF EX-OFFENDERS

Credentials Ltd t/a Step Ahead is using an Umbrella Body for the purpose of obtaining Disclosure checks from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Disclosure service to assess applicants' suitability for positions of trust.

We comply with the CRB Code of Practice and undertake to treat all applicants for positions fairly. We undertake not to discriminate unfairly against any subject of a disclosure on the basis of conviction or other information revealed.

Step Ahead are committed to fair treatment of individuals and users of its services, regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and responsibilities for dependents, age, physical/mental disability or offending background. We have a written policy on the recruitment of ex-offenders.

We actively promote equality of opportunity for all with the right mix of talent, skills and potential and welcome applications from a wide range of candidates, including those with criminal records. We select candidates for interview based on their skills, qualifications and experience.

Disclosure is only requested after a thorough risk assessment has indicated that one is both proportionate and relevant to the position concerned. Where a Disclosure is required, all application forms, job adverts and recruitment briefs will contain a statement that a Disclosure will be requested in the event of the individual being offered the position.

Where a Disclosure is to form part of a recruitment process, we encourage all applicants called for interview to provide details of any criminal record at an early stage in the application process. We request that this information is sent under separate, confidential cover to a designated person within the organisation, this information will only be seen by those who need to see it as part of the recruitment process.

Unless the nature of the position allows us to ask questions about your entire criminal record we only ask about "UN-spent" convictions as defined in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

We ensure that all those who are involved in the recruitment process, have been suitably trained to identify and assess the relevance and circumstances of offences. We also ensure that they have received appropriate guidance and training in the relevant legislation relating to the employment of ex-offenders, i.e. the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

At interview, or in a separate discussion, we ensure that an open and measured discussion takes place on the subject of any offences or other matter that might be relevant to the position. Failure to reveal information that is directly relevant to the position sought could lead to withdrawal of an offer for employment.

We make every subject of a CRB Disclosure aware of the existence of the CRB Code of Practice and make a copy available on request.

We undertake to discuss any matter revealed in a Disclosure with the person seeking the position before withdrawing a conditional offer of employment.

Having a criminal record will not necessarily bar you from working with this organisation. This will depend on the nature of the position and the circumstances and background of the offences.

POLICY STATEMENT ON THE SECURE STORAGE, HANDLING, USE, RETENTION AND DISPOSAL OF DISCLOSURES AND DISCLOSURE INFORMATION

Background

All individuals or organisations using the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Disclosure service must comply fully with the CRB Code of Practice. Amongst other things, this obliges them to have a written policy on the correct handling and safekeeping of Disclosure information.

General principles

As an organisation using the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Disclosure service to help assess the suitability of applicants for positions of trust, Credentials Ltd t/a Step Ahead complies fully with the CRB Code of Practice regarding the correct handling, use, storage, retention and disposal of Disclosures and Disclosure Information. It also complies fully with its obligations under the Data Protection Act and other relevant legislation pertaining to the safe handling, use, storage, retention and disposal of Disclosure information and has a written policy on these matters, which is available to those who wish to see it on request.

Storage & Access

Disclosure information is never kept on an applicant's personnel file and is always kept separately and securely, in lockable, non-portable, storage containers with access strictly controlled and limited to those who are entitled to see it as part of their duties.

Handling

In accordance with section 124 of the Police Act 1997, Disclosure information is only passed to those who are authorised to receive it in the course of their duties. We maintain a record of all those to whom disclosures or Disclosure information has been revealed and we recognise that it is a criminal offence to pass this information to anyone who is not entitled to receive it.

Usage

Disclosure information is only used for the specific purpose for which it was requested and for which the applicant's full consent has been given.

Retention

Once a recruitment (or other relevant) decision has been made, we do not keep Disclosure information for any longer than is absolutely necessary. This is generally for a period of up to six months, to allow for the consideration and resolution of any disputes or complaints. If, in very exceptional circumstances, it is considered necessary to keep Disclosure information for longer than six-months, we will consult the CRB about this and will give full consideration to the Data Protection and Human Rights of the individual before doing so. Throughout this time, the usual conditions regarding safe storage and strictly controlled access will prevail.

Disposal

Once the retention period has elapsed, we will ensure that any Disclosure information is immediately suitably destroyed by secure means, i.e. by shredding, pulping or incinerating. While awaiting destruction, Disclosure information will not be kept in any insecure receptacle (e.g. waste bin or confidential waste sack). We will not keep any photocopy or other image of the Disclosure or any copy or representation of the contents of a Disclosure. However, notwithstanding the above, we may keep a record of the date of issue of a Disclosure, the name of the subject, the type of Disclosure requested, the position for which the Disclosure was requested, the unique reference number of the Disclosure and the details of the recruitment decision taken.

Loss of Documents

Should at any time Disclosure documents containing personal information be lost we will immediately report this to Atlantic Data Ltd who will report the matter to the CRB. We are required to give details of what has occurred and also put in writing what we believe to have occurred together with confirmation that all requirements contained in this document have been met.

DATA PROTECTION POLICY

The following principles are essentially good business practice in relation to the collection, use and storage of data. They are as follows:

First Principle

Personal data shall be processed fairly and lawfully and, in particular, shall not be processed unless one or more of the following conditions are met:-

- The data subject has given his consent;
- Processing is necessary for the performance of a contract to which the subject is a party or for entering into a contract at the request of the subject;
- Processing is necessary to comply with a non-contractual legal obligation;
- Processing is necessary to protect the vital interests of the data subject or otherwise for the administration of justice.

Second Principle

Personal data shall be obtained only for one or more specified and lawful purposes, and shall not be further processed in any manner incompatible with those purposes.

Third Principle

Personal data shall be adequate, relevant, and not excessive in relation to the purposes for which it is processed. Individuals should only be required to give such information about themselves that is relevant to the employment they are seeking.

Fourth Principle

Personal data shall be accurate and where necessary kept up to date.

Fifth Principle

Personal data shall be kept for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which it was processed.

Sixth Principle

Personal data shall be processed in accordance with the rights of data subjects under the 1998 Act.

Seventh Principle

Appropriate technical and organisational measures shall be taken against unauthorised or unlawful processing and accidental loss destruction or damage to personal data.

Eighth Principle

Personal Data shall not be transferred to a country or territory outside the European Economic Area unless that country/territory ensures an adequate level of data protection. Consideration should be given to the nature of the data, the law or codes of conduct of that country and security measures in place in that country.

MATERNITY RIGHTS

Introduction

All Employees working under a contract of employment for Step Ahead enjoy the following statutory rights:

- paid time off to receive ante-natal care;
- up to 26 weeks' ordinary maternity leave;
- up to 26 weeks' additional maternity leave;
- protection from dismissal by reason of pregnancy or childbirth;
- right to return to work after maternity leave;
- offer of alternative work before being suspended on maternity grounds;
- remuneration on suspension on maternity grounds;
- statutory maternity pay.

Time off for Ante-natal Care

A pregnant employee is entitled to reasonable time off with pay at the appropriate hourly rate for ante-natal care. This is her right regardless of length of service or hours worked. The employee must produce a medical appointment card or some other document showing that the appointment has been made.

Maternity Leave

Every employee (irrespective of length of service) has a right of up to 26 weeks' "ordinary" maternity leave and up to a further 26 weeks' "additional" maternity leave, during which time she is entitled to receive the benefit of her terms and conditions of employment with the exception of remuneration.

The earliest point at which an employee may commence her ordinary maternity leave is at the beginning of the 11th week before the expected week of childbirth. She is not obliged to take her entire 52 weeks' maternity leave and may return to work at an earlier date providing she gives her employer 8 weeks' notice of her return date and does not return within 2 weeks of giving birth. The maximum amount of leave an employee could take is therefore one year (i.e. 26 weeks' ordinary maternity leave followed by 26 weeks' additional maternity leave).

If an employee has opted to work beyond four weeks before the start of her Expected Week of Confinement and then falls ill due to a pregnancy related illness, her maternity leave will be triggered automatically at this point.

The employee may inform the Company that she does not intend to take the full leave period and may return to work at an earlier date, but it must not be earlier than two weeks after giving birth. Again the employee must give 8 weeks' notice to the company of her intention to return to work earlier than the end of the additional maternity leave period.

Notification of Commencement of Maternity Leave

An employee must tell the company of her intention to take maternity leave by the 15th week before the week her baby is due (unless this is not reasonably practicable). She will need to state:

- that she is pregnant;
- the week her baby is expected to be born; and
- when she would like her maternity leave to start.

The employee will be able to change her mind about when she plans to start her leave as long as she gives her employer 28 days' notice of any change.

The company will have 28 days in which to reply in writing to an employee's notification explaining the date she is expected to return to work assuming that she takes her full entitlement.

The Right to Return to Work

An employee returning to work after ordinary maternity leave may return to the same job and at the same place.

An employee returning to work after the start of additional maternity may return to the same job in the same place, unless that is not reasonably practicable.

If the employee is unable to return to her original job because the job is redundant, or because it is not reasonably practicable for her to return to her original job, the company will offer a suitable alternative position (where one is available) and the terms and conditions relating to the new position will not be substantially less favourable than those of her previous position. If the employee rejects the offer, the company may terminate her employment by reason of redundancy

An employee on maternity leave does not have to give notice of her return if she wishes to return at the end of her additional maternity leave period. It is presumed that she will return at the end of her additional maternity leave period. But if she decides to return early she must give the company at least 8 weeks' notice. If an employee on maternity leave wishes to return to work early but does not give the full 8 weeks', or any, notice, the company may delay the employee's return to work by up to 8 weeks.

Compulsory maternity leave

An employee is not permitted to return to work within the period of two weeks of giving birth.

Return to part time work

Should the employee request to return to work on a part time basis following maternity leave, such request will be considered carefully and accommodated wherever reasonable.

Suspension from Work for Health and Safety Reasons Related to Maternity

The company is entitled to suspend an employee on maternity grounds if the suspension is necessary in order to comply with a statutory requirement or in compliance with any recommendation contained in a relevant provision of a *Health and Safety at Work Act 1974* code of practice.

For example suspension would be permitted where:

- The employee is engaged in work which could pose a risk to a new or expectant mother or her baby and it is not reasonable to alter her working conditions or hours of work or where altering her hours would not avoid such risk; or
- a new or expectant mother is working at night and she provides a medical certificate stating that it is necessary for her health and safety that she should not work such hours.

Right to alternative work

Before being suspended on maternity grounds the company will offer the employee any suitable alternative work that is available. This means work which is suitable and appropriate for her to do having regard to the circumstances and on the same terms and conditions as her previous job.

Right to remuneration

If the company decides to suspend an employee from work on maternity grounds, the employee is entitled to remuneration which is to be calculated on one week's pay for each week of suspension.

STATUTORY MATERNITY PAY

Qualifying Conditions

An employee must satisfy the following conditions before she can qualify for SMP:

She must have been continuously employed for at least 26 weeks as at the 15th week before the week the baby is due (WBD). This is irrespective of the number of hours worked. The 15th week is known as the Notification Week (NW).

- Her average weekly earnings for the eight weeks up to and including the NW must not be less than the lower earnings limit for the payment of National Insurance contributions which applied in the NW;
- She must still be pregnant at the 11th week before the WBD or have had the baby by that time;
- Medical evidence must be provided of the due date of the baby (i.e. the WBD), this will normally be on form Mat B1 (maternity certificate);
- At least 28 days' notice (or, if that is not reasonably practicable, as soon as is reasonably practicable) must be given to the employer of the date from which the employee wishes her SMP to begin;
- She must have stopped working.

Period of Entitlement

SMP is payable for a period of 39 weeks, the period during which it can be paid is called the 'maternity pay period' (MPP). SMP cannot start earlier than the 11th week before the due date of the baby nor later than the week immediately following childbirth.

SMP may be payable for a shorter period if the employee:

- dies;
- goes into legal custody;
- goes outside the European Community;
- works for her employer during the MPP either before or after the birth or works for a different employer during the MPP after the birth.

Rates of Pay

There are two rates of SMP.

The “earnings related rate” is 90% of the employee’s average weekly earnings, payable for the first 6 weeks of the period for which SMP is due. This is calculated by taking her average weekly earnings for the eight weeks ending with the Notification Week (NW) i.e. her actual earnings for the eight weeks up to the 15th week before the week the baby is due.

For the remaining 33 weeks of the maternity pay period, the employee will receive the standard SMP rate (or 90% of average earnings if this is less).

Non-Entitlement to SMP

If an employee is not entitled to SMP because she has not met the qualifying conditions, the company will complete and issue Form SMP1 together with the maternity certificate to the employee. This will be done within seven days of the decision that the employee is not entitled to SMP enabling the employee to claim her maternity allowance from the DWP.

PATERNITY LEAVE AND PAY

Employees are entitled to take paternity leave and pay if they meet the following conditions.

Employees need to:

- have (or expect to have) responsibility for the child's upbringing;
- be the biological father of the child or the mother's husband or partner;
- have worked continuously for 26 weeks leading into the 15th week before the week the baby is due;

The company can ask their employees to provide a self-certificate to prove that they meet these conditions. The self-certificate must state that the employee meets the eligibility criteria and give the relevant notice.

Employees who are adopting a child are also entitled to receive paternity leave and pay for a child who is newly placed for adoption where the employee is notified by an approved adoption agency of being matched with a child. When a couple adopts, they can choose which parent takes paternity leave and which takes adoption leave (see below).

Length of Paternity Leave

Employees who meet the conditions are entitled to take paternity leave of either one or two weeks' duration. Paternity leave can start:

- from the date of the child's birth, or
- from a chosen number of days/weeks after the date of the child's birth, or
- from a chosen date.

The only condition is that leave must be completed within 56 days of the actual date of birth of the child. If the child arrives earlier than expected, the leave must be taken at any time between the actual birth and within 56 days of the expected week of birth.

An employee is only entitled to one period of paternity leave even if more than one child is born as a result of the same pregnancy.

Amount of Paternity Pay

The company will pay Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) for either one or two consecutive weeks depending on the length of paternity leave the employee decides to take. The rate of SPP will be the same as the standard rate of Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP).

Notice Requirement for Paternity Leave

Employees will need to notify the company of the following:

- the week the baby is due;
- whether they want to take 1 or 2 weeks' leave
- when they want their leave to start.

They must notify the company of these facts and of their intention to take paternity leave by the 15th week before the baby is expected.

They can change their mind about the date they wish to start their leave by letting the company know at least 28 days in advance (unless this is not reasonably practicable). They should also give the company at least 28 days' notice of the date they expect SPP payments to start unless this is also not reasonably practicable.

Entitlements during Paternity Leave

Employees are entitled to return to the same job following paternity leave. During paternity leave, they are entitled to the benefit of their normal terms and conditions of employment (except for those relating to wages or salary).

ADOPTION LEAVE AND PAY

Adoption leave and pay are available to individuals who adopt and to one partner of a couple where a couple adopts jointly. It is up to the couple to decide which partner takes adoption leave and which takes paternity leave. For the partner taking paternity leave, the rules are as set out above but with slight variations to take into account the fact that it is an adoption rather than a birth.

To qualify for adoption leave, an employee must:

- be newly matched with a child for adoption by an approved adoption agency
- have worked continuously for the company for 26 weeks leading into the week when he or she is notified of the match.

Adoption leave and pay is available to employees adopting children from both within the UK and overseas.

Length of Adoption Leave

Employees are entitled to 26 weeks' ordinary adoption leave followed immediately by up to 26 weeks' additional adoption leave (i.e. a total of 1 year's leave). An employee will usually be paid during ordinary adoption leave and not paid during additional adoption leave.

Employees are entitled to start their leave;

- from the date of the child's placement or
- from a fixed date up to 14 days before the expected date of placement

Employees are only entitled to one period of adoption leave irrespective of how many children are placed for adoption as part of the same arrangement.

Notice Requirement for Adoption Leave

Employees must tell the company of their intention to take adoption leave within seven days of being notified by their adoption agency that they have been matched with a child for adoption (unless this is not reasonably practicable). Employees must provide the company with documentary evidence from the adoption agency to prove that they are entitled to adoption leave and pay.

Employees must state:

- when they expect the child to be placed with them; and
- when they would like the adoption leave to begin.

Provided they give the company 28 days' notice of the change, employees can change their mind about when they would like their leave to start. The company must reply to the notification within 28 days stating the date on which they expect the employee to return to work if they take their full entitlement to adoption leave.

Employees do not have to give any further notification to the company if they merely intend to return to work at the end of their full adoption leave entitlement. However, those employees who wish to return before the leave period expires must give the company 8 weeks' notice.

Amount of Adoption Pay

Qualifying employees are entitled to receive statutory adoption pay for 39 weeks at the same rate as the standard rate for statutory maternity pay.

Employees are also entitled to the benefit of their normal terms and conditions of employment with the exception of any conditions relating to wages or salary throughout the adoption leave period.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICY

Flexible Working

Introduction

Employees who are parents of children aged under the age of 17 (or of disabled children aged under 18) have the right to apply to work flexibly. Carers of dependent adults also have the right to apply to work flexibly. The company must consider very carefully any request for flexible working, this does not mean that employees have an automatic right to work flexibly. The company may have very good reasons why we cannot accede to our employee's request to work flexibly.

To be eligible to request flexible working you must be either:

- The child's mother, father, adopter, guardian or foster parent, or be married to or the partner of the child's mother, father, adopter, guardian or foster parent, or
- Caring for an adult who is your spouse, partner, civil partner, parent, adult child (including adopted children), brother, sister, uncle, aunt, grandparent or someone else living at the same address as you (including step-relatives and in-laws).

If you fulfil one of the above two criteria, you must also fulfil all the relevant criteria below:

- You must have worked with the Company continuously for at least 26 weeks at the date the application is made.
- If you are making your application in respect of a child, you must make the application no later than two weeks before the child's 17th birthday (or 18th birthday in the case of a disabled child).
- You must have or expect to have responsibility for the child's upbringing or be caring for the dependent adult.
- You must be making the application to enable you to care for the child or adult.
- In all cases you may not make more than one application in each 12 months.

Employees may request a change in the hours/times they work or request to work from home. Before making the request, the employee is obliged to give careful consideration to how the company can adopt the suggested working pattern. It is up to the employee to suggest how the company can reorganise its business around their request. The request must be in writing and, if accepted by

the company, may entail a permanent change in the employee's contract of employment.

Flexible Working Procedure

The company will meet with the employee to seriously consider the proposed working pattern and discuss the options with the employee within 28 days of receiving the employee's written request. The employee will be entitled to bring a companion to the meeting if desired.

The company will write to the employee within 14 days and either:

- agree the new work pattern and a start date for the new flexible working to take effect; or,
- set out clear business grounds why the request for flexible working is not acceptable and the reasons behind the decision.

The employee will then have 14 days in which to appeal against the company's decision.

Refusing Requests

As already stated, the law on flexible working only gives an employee an opportunity to *request* flexible working: it does not give them an absolute right to work flexibly. There are a series of specific business grounds on which the company is entitled to turn down an application. The reasons are as follows:

- Burden of additional costs;
- Detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand;
- Inability to reorganise work among existing staff;
- Inability to recruit new staff;
- Detrimental impact on performance;
- Insufficiency of work during proposed hours;
- Planned structural changes.

Parental Leave

Parental leave is a right for parents to take time off work to look after a child or make arrangements for the child's welfare. Parents can use it to spend more time with children and strike a better balance between their work and family commitments.

Entitlement

Who is entitled?

An employee who:-

- has 1 year's continuous service with the company;
- is the parent named on the birth certificate of a child who is under 5 years old; or
- has adopted a child under the age of 18. The entitlement to leave lasts for 5 years from the date of adoption, or until the child's 18th birthday, whichever is sooner; or
- has acquired formal parental responsibility for a child who is under 5 years old.

Length of parental leave

- Employees get 13 weeks in total for each child who is under 5 years old.
- Parents of disabled children get 18 weeks in total.
- Part-time employees are entitled to leave in proportion to the amount of time they work.
- For multiple births an employee is entitled to 13 weeks in respect of each child.

When can parental leave be taken?

- Parents can take leave up to their child's 5th birthday
- Adoptive parents can take leave up to the fifth anniversary of the date of placement, or until the child's 18th birthday if that is sooner
- Parents of disabled children can take leave up to their child's 18th birthday

How to take Parental Leave

- Leave may be taken in blocks of 1 week or more although part of a week will count as 1 week out of the total 13-week entitlement. Parents of disabled children may take leave in blocks of one day or multiples of a day. All leave is subject to an annual maximum of 4 weeks.
- The employee must give a minimum of 21 days notice. It need not be in writing.
- The company must reply to the request for leave in writing within a period of 7 days from receipt of the notice to take leave.
- The company can postpone leave to an agreed date or a suitable future period (but for no more than 6 months) where the needs of the business make this necessary. Leave cannot be postponed when the employee gives notice to take it immediately after the time the child is born or is placed with the family for adoption
- The employee may require proof of the child's age or date of adoption.
- If an employee tries to take parental leave dishonestly the company can deal with him/her under ordinary disciplinary procedures.

During and after parental leave

- During the period of leave an employee will remain employed but need not be paid and neither the company nor employee will be bound by any contractual terms except those of good faith and confidentiality.
- At the end of a period of parental leave the employee must be given his/her old job back, or a job which has the same, or better, status and Terms and Conditions as the old job.

Time off for Dependants

Introduction

In many cases the employee has the right to take time off work to deal with an emergency involving someone who depends on them.

Who counts as a dependant?

- spouse or partner
- child or parent
- someone living with the employee as part of their family can be considered a dependant
- others who rely solely on the employee for assistance or the provision of care may also qualify.

What counts as an emergency?

An emergency is when someone who depends on the employee:

- is ill and needs their help
- is involved in an accident or assaulted
- needs them to arrange their longer term care
- needs them to deal with an unexpected disruption or breakdown in care, such as a childminder or nurse failing to turn up
- goes into labour
- attend or arrange a funeral for a dependant in the event of their death

Notification and payment

The employee must tell the company as soon as possible why they are away from work and how long they expect to be off.

If the employee returns to work before they have had the chance to contact the company, they must still tell them why they were absent. The employee may take off as much time as necessary to deal with the immediate emergency.

If an employee fails to comply with this provision they will lose the right to time off unless they are unable to comply with the provision until their return.

Any time off will be unpaid unless the company specifies otherwise.

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

1. Purpose and scope

This procedure is designed to help and encourage all employees to achieve and maintain standards of conduct, attendance and job performance. The aim is to ensure consistent and fair treatment for all in the organisation.

2. Principles

This disciplinary procedure will not normally apply during the first 12 months of employment.

No disciplinary action will be taken against an employee until the case has been fully investigated.

At every stage in the procedure the employee will be advised of the nature of the complaint against him/her and will be given the opportunity to state his/her case before any decision is made.

Employees will normally be given at least 2 days' notice in writing of any disciplinary hearing. Employees must make every effort to attend the hearing.

At all stages of the procedure the employee will have the right to be accompanied by a suitably qualified trade union representative, worker representative or work colleague at any hearing which may result in a disciplinary sanction or dismissal under this procedure.

No employee will be dismissed for a first breach of discipline except in the case of gross misconduct, when the penalty will be dismissal without notice or payment in lieu of notice.

An employee will have the right to appeal against any disciplinary penalty imposed.

The procedure may be implemented at any stage if the employee's alleged misconduct warrants such action.

3. Informal Discussions / Counselling

Where reasonable, before taking formal disciplinary action, your Line Manager will make every effort to resolve the matter by informal discussions with you.

4. The Procedure

Stage 1 – first written warning

If, despite informal discussions, conduct or performance does not meet acceptable standards the employee may be given a first written warning by their Line Manager. The individual will be advised:-

- the reason for the warning
- that it constitutes the first stage of the disciplinary procedure
- that the individual has the right of appeal

A note of the oral warning will be kept on the personnel file but it will be spent after 9 months, subject to achievement and sustainment of satisfactory conduct or performance.

Stage 2 – final written warning

If a first offence is more serious, or if there is no improvement in standards following a first written warning, or if a further offence of any nature occurs following a first written warning, the employee will receive a final written warning normally from their Line Manager. A final written warning may also be given for a first offence in exceptional circumstances. This will give details of the complaint, the improvement or change in behaviour required and the timescale allowed for this. A copy of this written warning will be kept on the personnel file but will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after 12 months subject to achievement and sustainment of satisfactory conduct or performance.

The warning will also inform the employee of the right of appeal, and that dismissal or some other action short of dismissal may be considered if there is no sustained satisfactory improvement or change.

Stage 3 – dismissal or other sanction

If there is still a failure to improve the final step in the procedure may be dismissal or some other action short of dismissal such as demotion (which may incur a reduction in pay) or disciplinary suspension or transfer. Dismissal decisions can only be taken by a Director, and the employee will be provided, as soon as reasonably practicable, with written reasons for dismissal, the date on which the employment will terminate, and the right of appeal. The decision to dismiss will be confirmed in writing.

If some sanction short of dismissal is imposed, the employee will receive details of the complaint, will be warned that dismissal could result if there is no satisfactory improvement, and will be advised of the right of appeal. A copy of the

written warning confirming the sanction will be kept on the personnel file but will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after 12 months subject to achievement and sustainment of satisfactory conduct or performance.

5. Gross misconduct

If the employee is accused of an act of gross misconduct, he/she may be suspended from work on full pay, normally for no more than five working days, while the alleged offence is investigated.

If, after investigation, it is deemed that the employee has committed an offence of the following nature (the list is not exhaustive), the normal consequence will be summary dismissal without notice or pay in lieu of notice:

- theft, fraud, deliberate falsification of records.
- deliberate damage to organisational property.
- serious negligence which causes unacceptable loss, damage or injury.
- serious act of insubordination.
- unauthorised entry to computer records.
- breach of the provisions of the following Acts, and any amendments to them: Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976, the Employment Agencies Act 1979, the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and the Employment Equality Regulations relating to Religion or Belief (2003), Sexual Orientation (2003) and Age (2006). For the purposes of this process a failure to report any breach which comes to the employee's notice may be treated as if the breach had been committed by the employee.
- Breach of Step Ahead policies and procedures. For the purposes of this process a failure to report any breach which comes to the employee's notice may be treated as if the breach had been committed by the employee.
- Unauthorised use or disclosure of confidential information or business matters relating to the Company, its clients, temporaries, contractors or applicants;
- Acts of violence, drunkenness or the taking of non-prescribed drugs in such a way as to impair the ability to properly carry out the employee's duties;
- A criminal offence committed at work other than a minor road traffic offence committed in the course of the Employment, or an offence committed outside work which is incompatible with the employee remaining in employment;
- Falsification of information or references on appointment;

- Unauthorised absence;
- Acceptance of any bribe, secret profit or unauthorised commission;
- Any conduct tending to bring the Company or the employee into disrepute or which results in the loss of custom of a client, temporary or applicant or a loss of business;
- Tampering with or changing the operational settings of the Company's computer systems;
- Refusal to obey a lawful instruction in connection with the Employment;
- Disclosing salary details and remuneration to other employees of the Company;
- Disclosing the employee's ASP password to **anyone** including Step Ahead colleagues.

6. Appeals

An employee who wishes to appeal against a disciplinary decision should inform the Director within five working days. The Director will hear all appeals and his/her decision is final. At the appeal any disciplinary penalty imposed will be reviewed.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

It is the Company's policy to ensure that employees with a grievance relating to their employment can use a procedure which can help to resolve grievances as quickly and as fairly as possible.

At all stages of the Grievance Procedure the employee may be represented or accompanied by a fellow employee of their choice or by a suitably qualified trade union official.

Informal Discussions

If the employee has a grievance about their employment the employee should discuss it informally with their Line Manager. We hope that the majority of concerns will be resolved at this stage.

Stage 1 - Grievance

If the employee feels that the matter has not been resolved through informal discussions, the employee should put their grievance in writing to their Line Manager. The employee will be invited to a grievance meeting, normally within 5 working days of receipt of the grievance letter. The Line Manager will normally give a written decision within 5 working days of the grievance meeting.

Stage 2 - Appeal

If the matter is not resolved to the employee's satisfaction, the employee may appeal in writing to a Director or an authorised deputy. The employee will be invited to an appeal meeting with the Director or his/her authorised deputy to discuss the matter, normally within 10 working days of receipt of the appeal letter. The Director or authorised deputy will normally give his/her written decision within 5 working days of the appeal meeting.

The decision of the person hearing the appeal is final.

Grievances raised in the context of other procedures

A grievance properly raised by an employee in response to an investigation of his or her apparent misconduct, underperformance or absence may be addressed by one of three routes, depending on the nature and timing of the grievance:

- (a) The grievance may be considered by the manager of the original matter, in mitigation of any misconduct, underperformance or absence, at a single formal hearing. This route may be appropriate where the grievance is raised, for example, on procedural grounds during the disciplinary process.

- (b) The original matter and the grievance investigation may be managed simultaneously at a single formal hearing by a different manager, at the same level of seniority as the original manager. This route may be appropriate where the grievance is raised, for example, on grounds of harassment during the disciplinary process.
- (c) The grievance may be considered by a more senior manager as part of an appeal hearing. This is appropriate where the grievance is raised after any formal action has been taken.

Whichever route the manager decides is appropriate, a single hearing will be sufficient to satisfy all legal requirements. Similarly, a single hearing will satisfy all legal requirements where an employee raises more than one grievance at the same time on related matters.

STAKEHOLDER PENSION

Everyone needs to consider what sort of financial provision they will make for their retirement. You may think that there's plenty of time to consider life after work later, but with the increased need for each person to take responsibility for their future, you really can't begin too early. State benefits are reducing in real terms and to maintain your standard of living later in life, it would be wise to act now.

What are stakeholder pensions?

Stakeholder pensions are simple, low cost "personal" pensions, designed to encourage more people to provide financially for their retirement. This type of pension must meet certain minimum standards set by the Government.

Credentials Limited (Step Ahead) has introduced a stakeholder scheme for their employees.

Scheme details

After reviewing our options, we have chosen Legal & general Assurance Society Limited for our stakeholder pensions provider. They are registered with OPRA (Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority) as a provider that meets the Government's required minimum standards. We want the best for our employees and Legal & General's long-standing experience and track record makes them in our opinion a good choice.

Stakeholder scheme providers cannot charge more than 1% a year of the total savings as a management charge and must allow savers to stop, start, and increase or reduce payments without penalties. The minimum level of contribution, which can be paid into a scheme, is £20 a month. All contributions are to be paid net of basic rate tax (even for the self-employed).

Eligibility

The following employees are **NOT** eligible:

- Any employee who has been employed for a continuous period of less than three months.
- Any employee whose earnings fall below the Lower Earnings Limit of National Insurance for one or more weeks within the last three months.
- Any employee who is a member of Step Ahead's contributory group personal pension scheme
- Any employee who is eligible to join Step Ahead's contributory group personal pension scheme but did not do so.

GROUP PERSONAL PENSION

For flexible employees, entirely at the discretion of the Directors the Company operates a contributory group personal pension scheme to which it may contribute on the employee's behalf following the completion of 12 months' satisfactory employment, during which 1,624 hours have been worked (pro-rata for part-time flexible employees. Full details of the scheme can be obtained from the Directors.

A contracting out certificate pursuant to the Pension Schemes Act 1993 is not in force.

SALARY ADVANCE

There is no contractual entitlement to advances in salary and such advances shall be made only in accordance with such agreed policies and/or schemes as may be in force at any time, or otherwise as authorised by the Director.

Advances are made subject to your agreement to the conditions of the prevailing policy or scheme, and subject to any conditions specific to the individual arrangement.

Step Ahead may make deductions from your salary to recover the full amount of the advance according to the agreed schedule of repayment. In the event of you leaving Step Ahead's employment before the full amount of an advance has been repaid, the outstanding balance falls due immediately and may be deducted from any salary payment(s) due to you without further notice if not repaid by another method.

If you are found to be in breach of any condition under which an advance has been made, you may be subject to disciplinary action and may be required immediately to repay any outstanding balance in full. In these circumstances then the advance, if not repaid by another method, may be deducted from any salary payment due to you without further notice.

Where you have received an advance for any purpose and have yet to repay it in full, you may nevertheless apply for a further advance for another purpose. However, additional advances shall not be available where the effect of combining the advances would be to exceed any maximum permitted amount as defined either by the statutory or any Step Ahead policy provisions in force.

ABSENCE FROM WORK

In the event of your absence for whatever reason you or someone on your behalf should contact your manager before 9.00am on the first day of absence to inform him/her of the reason for your absence. SMS, Text and email messages will not be acceptable. Notification through third parties may only be acceptable where there are genuine reasons for which you are unable to make contact in person.

You should also leave details of how and where you can be contacted during the period of absence and an initial indication of your expected date of return to work.

Any unauthorised absence must be properly explained and in the case of an absence of uncertain duration you must keep the Company informed on a daily basis of its expected duration.

In the event of continuing sickness, the employee or a representative (in the event that the employee is legitimately unable to represent themselves) must contact us not less than 2 working days before the end of the current certified sick period to give Step Ahead an indication of the likeliness of their return to work.

Employees who are unfit for work by reason of ill-health, injury or other medical condition should stay away from duty. In the case of contact with infectious or contagious diseases, employees must not stay away from duty if otherwise fit for work unless medically advised not to attend work, but should report the fact of contact to their divisional head.

A period of absence due to injury sustained in the course of employment and which is not the fault of the employee shall not be recorded for the purposes of the Sick Leave Scheme and employees will receive their full normal pay during such absence. The director and your divisional manager shall normally be aware of such absence as a direct consequence of your injury occurring at work. However, you should initially ensure that your division is aware of your absence and that it is related to an injury at work. You need take no further action but must provide evidence of your continuing unfitness for work, keep in contact with us to provide information with regard to any changes in your expected date of return, and may not return to work until authorised to do so.

If the absence is due to illness (including injury or other disability) and is for more than 3 days you must obtain and complete a self-certification form to be handed in to your manager as soon as practicably possible.

A medical certificate signed by your doctor as to the reason for your absence must be handed or sent to your manager if you are absent for any period of 8

consecutive calendar days or more. A new medical certificate should be sent each week thereafter.

Employees who have been ill for 8 or more calendar days are not permitted to return to work before their medical certificate expires unless they obtain additional certification indicating their renewed fitness for work. Similarly, employees may not normally return to work after medically certificated absences of more than two weeks without presenting appropriate evidence of their fitness for work.

Return to work interview

Your director/divisional manager or their nominee will arrange a return to work interview following your return from a period of sickness absence.

This will take the form of a brief private conversation to establish what if any support you may still need; determine if there is any underlying cause for your absence with which step ahead may help; and update you on how your workload has been handled in your absence.

You may also be reminded of the need to present certification to the administration department and you should advise your manager if you have already done so.

It shall not be necessary for you to give details of the nature of your ill-health during the interview (unless this is essential for health and safety reasons), though we encourage you to do that if you are comfortable in doing so.

HOLIDAYS

You are entitled to the following paid holidays:

- statutory holidays which are New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, May Day, Spring Bank Holiday, Late Summer Bank Holiday, Christmas Day and Boxing Day, unless on such Bank Holiday you are required to carry out your duties of Employment, in which case you will be given another day's holiday in lieu of the Bank Holiday worked;
- The equivalent of 5.6 weeks in each holiday year based on your average hours worked per week. This entitlement is subject to the following paragraphs and shall be taken at times to be agreed with your manager. Such agreement is to be obtained before you have committed yourself to booking or any other alternative positive arrangements.

Following satisfactory service for 2 consecutive years' full-time employment (including, in the case of flexible employees, the completion of 1,624 hours' service (pro rata for part-time flexible employees) during each consecutive year of service), your holiday entitlement will be increased as follows:-

From	Entitlement
3 rd holiday year	22 days
4 th holiday year	23 days
5 th holiday year	24 days
6 th holiday year onwards	25 days

Part-time workers' holiday will be increased on a pro-rata basis.

For established employees the holiday year is the calendar year from 1st January to 31st December, and for flexible employees the holiday year runs from 1st February to 31st January .

All employees should take their holidays during the relevant holiday year. You will not be permitted to carry over unused holiday entitlement into a following year except with the express written consent of the Company. You will not be entitled to payment for unused holiday entitlement unless you leave our employment with outstanding holiday entitlement.

You may not take as holiday more than 10 working days consecutively out of your entitlement without the prior written consent of the Directors.

If you leave our employment with an outstanding holiday entitlement, you will, in addition to any other sums to which you may be entitled, be paid a sum representing salary for the number of days' holiday entitlement outstanding. If you leave our employment having taken more than the accumulated holiday entitlement for the proportion of the current holiday year that you have worked

then a sum equivalent to wages for the additional holiday taken will be deducted from any final payment to you and the balance will be paid to you.

LEAVING THE COMPANY

Termination of Employment

Your notice period is set out in your contract of employment.

Nothing prevents us from terminating your employment summarily or otherwise in the event of any serious breach by you of the terms of your employment or in the event of any act or acts of gross misconduct by you.

Termination of Employment due to ill-health

1. If, at the end of the period of paid sick leave entitlement, you are still unable to resume duties, Step Ahead (having obtained appropriate medical opinion and subject to any prevailing ill-health retirement arrangements) may terminate the employment on the grounds that your medical condition is such that there is no reasonable prospect of you fulfilling the terms of your employment contract. This shall not preclude the Director from continuing the employment, but such continuation will not confer any right of remuneration on you.
2. If, at any time during an extended period of sick leave, it can be established that your condition is such that there is no reasonable prospect of you fulfilling the terms of your employment contract, Step Ahead may give you notice of termination prior to the expiry of your paid sick-leave entitlement. Ill-health retirement may be appropriate in such circumstances and, if so, this option would normally be pursued so that such retirement can start as soon as practicable.

Neither 1 or 2 above shall interfere with the Step Ahead's statutory obligations under disability discrimination legislation or policy commitments to make every reasonable effort when employees become disabled to ensure that they stay in employment.

Consequences of Termination

Upon termination of the Employment for whatever reason you shall deliver to the Company all books, files, keys, paper, training notes and manuals, lists of temporary workers and/or contractors, client lists, applicant lists, records, materials and other property of or relating to the Company together with all copies thereof.

After Termination

For the purposes of this clause the following expressions shall have the following respective meanings:

- “Applicant” means an applicant for permanent or contract employment who is registered with the Company (or any group Company) at the Termination date and who is not also registered with the Competing Business at the Termination Date and was not an applicant known to the Employee prior to the Employment who he/she introduced to the Company.
- “Client” means a person, firm or corporate body in contact with the Company (or any group Company) at any time during the last six months of the Employment or for the period of the Employment if shorter, for the purpose of obtaining permanent, temporary or contract staff and whose name is recorded in the Company’s (or any Group Company’s) records and who has been invoiced by the Company for the introduction of permanent, contract or temporary staff.
- The “Competing Business” means any person, firm or corporate body providing services directly or indirectly in competition with the Company.
- “Flexible employee” means an individual who is at the Termination Date carrying out temporary or contract work for a client and who is not also registered with the Competing Business at the Termination Date and was not a person known to the Employee prior to the Employment who he/she introduced to the Company.
- “Termination Date” means the date upon which the Employment terminates for any reason whether by notice or without notice.

You may not without the prior written consent of the Company (such consent only to be withheld so far as may be reasonably necessary to protect the legitimate business interests of the Company) during the Employment or for a period of 6 months after the Termination Date whether alone or jointly with or as a shareholder, advisor, principal, partner, agent, Director, employee, consultant or otherwise of the Competing business, directly or indirectly:

- solicit or canvass or attempt to solicit or canvass business from any Applicant with whom you have become familiar as a result of the Employment;
- deal with or accept instructions from any Applicant with whom you have become familiar as a result of the Employment;
- solicit or canvass or attempt to solicit or canvass business from any Client with whom you have become familiar as a result of the Employment;
- deal with or accept instructions from any Client with whom you have become familiar as a result of the Employment;
- solicit or canvass or attempt to solicit or canvass business from any flexible employee;

- deal with or accept instructions from any flexible employee;
- employ or endeavour to entice away from the Company any person who was at the Termination Date in the employment of the Company;
- directly or indirectly interfere or seek to interfere with the continuance of supplies to the Company from any supplier of goods or services to the Company during 12 months preceding such termination; and
- take any action directly or indirectly that may damage the continuing goodwill of the Company.

Each of the above restrictions is separate and severable from the other. If one is unenforceable for any reason, but would be enforceable if some of its wording were deleted, it shall apply with such deletions as are necessary to make it enforceable.

Normal Retirement Date

Your employment will automatically end and you will retire at the end of the month in which you reach the age of 65. Any request to work beyond the normal retirement age will be considered by the company in line with the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations.

REFERENCING POLICY

When supplying a reference for a former member of staff, both temporary and permanent, Step Ahead can only confirm job title and employment dates.

This is to ensure we are consistent and fair in our approach and comments.