



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.