

Equal Opportunities Policy

Youth Start Limited

Company Number: 16864238

Registered Office: 370 Osmaston Park Road, Derby, DE24 8FB

Effective Date

1 January 2026

Next Review Date

1 January 2027

Introduction and Purpose

Youth Start Limited is committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion. This Equal Opportunities Policy sets out our commitment to ensuring that all candidates, employers, staff members, and other stakeholders are treated fairly and with respect, regardless of their protected characteristics.

We believe that diversity strengthens our organisation and improves outcomes for young people and employers. We are committed to creating an inclusive culture where all individuals feel valued, supported, and able to contribute fully.

This policy applies to all aspects of our recruitment, mentorship, and employment practices, including advertising vacancies, shortlisting candidates, conducting interviews, making employment decisions, providing mentorship and support, and managing complaints and disputes.

As a social enterprise focused on supporting young people aged 18-24 in the warehouse sector, we recognise that many of our candidates may face barriers to employment due to their age, background, or circumstances. We are committed to removing these barriers and providing equal opportunities for all.

This policy applies to all candidates who apply for placements through Youth Start Limited, all employers who engage candidates through Youth Start, all staff members, volunteers, and contractors, and all other individuals who interact with Youth Start.

Scope

This Equal Opportunities Policy applies to:

- All candidates aged 18-24 who apply for warehouse placements through Youth Start Limited
- All employers who engage candidates through Youth Start Limited

- All staff members, volunteers, and contractors employed or engaged by Youth Start Limited
- All recruitment, selection, and placement decisions
- All mentorship and support provided by Youth Start
- All employment decisions (including promotion, training, and termination)
- All interactions with candidates, employers, and other stakeholders

This policy does not apply to:

- Individuals who are not placed through Youth Start Limited or who do not interact with Youth Start
- Decisions made by employers after candidates are placed (although Youth Start supervises employer compliance with equal opportunities law)

Legal Framework

This Equal Opportunities Policy is based on the following legislation:

Equality Act 2010:

The primary legislation governing equality and discrimination in the United Kingdom. The Act protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics, including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Protected Characteristics:

The Equality Act 2010 identifies nine protected characteristics: - Age - Disability - Gender reassignment - Marriage and civil partnership - Pregnancy and maternity - Race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin) - Religion or belief (including lack of belief) - Sex - Sexual orientation

Types of Discrimination:

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits the following types of discrimination: - Direct discrimination (treating someone less favourably because of a protected characteristic) - Indirect discrimination (applying a provision, criterion, or practice that puts individuals with a protected characteristic at a disadvantage) - Harassment (unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic that violates dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment) - Victimisation (treating someone less favourably because they have made a complaint or given evidence under the Equality Act 2010) - Discrimination by association (discriminating against someone because they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic) - Discrimination by perception (discriminating against someone because they are perceived to have a protected characteristic, even if they do not)

Reasonable Adjustments:

The Equality Act 2010 requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to remove or reduce disadvantage experienced by individuals with disabilities or other protected characteristics.

Positive Action:

The Equality Act 2010 permits positive action to address underrepresentation or disadvantage experienced by individuals with protected characteristics, provided that such action is proportionate and does not constitute unlawful discrimination.

Employment Rights Act 1996 and Employment Tribunals Act 1996:

These Acts establish the framework for employment disputes and provide remedies for individuals who have experienced discrimination.

Youth Start's Commitment to Equality

Youth Start Limited is committed to:

Treating All Individuals Fairly:

We treat all candidates, employers, staff members, and other stakeholders fairly and with respect, regardless of their protected characteristics or background.

Removing Barriers to Employment:

We recognise that many young people aged 18-24 face barriers to employment. We are committed to removing these barriers and providing equal opportunities for all, particularly young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Promoting Diversity:

We actively promote diversity and inclusion in our recruitment, mentorship, and employment practices. We believe that diversity strengthens our organisation and improves outcomes for young people and employers.

Creating an Inclusive Culture:

We are committed to creating an inclusive culture where all individuals feel valued, supported, and able to contribute fully. We do not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or victimisation.

Complying with Equality Law:

We comply fully with the Equality Act 2010 and all other relevant equality legislation. We ensure that all our policies, procedures, and practices are non-discriminatory and promote equality.

Making Reasonable Adjustments:

We make reasonable adjustments to remove or reduce disadvantage experienced by individuals with disabilities or other protected characteristics. We work with individuals to identify adjustments that will enable them to participate fully in our recruitment, mentorship, and employment processes.

Monitoring and Reporting:

We monitor our recruitment, mentorship, and employment practices to ensure compliance with this policy and equality law. We collect and analyse equality data to identify any patterns of discrimination and to inform improvements to our practices.

Taking Action Against Discrimination:

We take all complaints of discrimination, harassment, and victimisation seriously. We investigate complaints promptly and take appropriate action to address any breaches of this policy.

Recruitment and Selection

Youth Start is committed to ensuring that all recruitment and selection decisions are made fairly and without discrimination.

Advertising Vacancies

Non-Discriminatory Language:

All vacancy advertisements use non-discriminatory language and do not discourage applications from individuals with protected characteristics. We do not use language that suggests preference for particular characteristics (such as “young and dynamic” or “native English speaker”) unless such requirements are genuinely occupational requirements.

Accessible Formats:

We provide vacancy information in accessible formats (such as large print, Braille, or audio) upon request, to ensure that individuals with disabilities can access information about vacancies.

Inclusive Messaging:

Our vacancy advertisements emphasise our commitment to equality and diversity and encourage applications from individuals from underrepresented groups.

Genuine Occupational Requirements:

Where a vacancy has genuine occupational requirements (such as a specific language requirement for a role), we clearly state these requirements in the advertisement and ensure that they are applied consistently and fairly.

Shortlisting

Objective Criteria:

Shortlisting decisions are based on objective criteria that are directly related to the requirements of the role. We do not make shortlisting decisions based on protected characteristics.

Consistent Application:

Shortlisting criteria are applied consistently to all candidates. We do not apply different criteria to candidates with different protected characteristics.

Blind Shortlisting:

Where possible, we use blind shortlisting techniques (such as removing names from application forms) to reduce the risk of unconscious bias in shortlisting decisions.

Reasonable Adjustments:

We make reasonable adjustments to shortlisting processes to ensure that candidates with disabilities or other protected characteristics are not disadvantaged. For example, we may accept application forms in alternative formats or provide additional time for candidates to complete application forms.

Interviews and Assessment

Objective Assessment:

Interview and assessment decisions are based on objective criteria that are directly related to the requirements of the role. We do not make decisions based on protected characteristics.



Consistent Approach:

We use consistent interview and assessment approaches for all candidates. All candidates are asked the same core questions, and responses are assessed against the same criteria.

Diverse Interview Panels:

Where possible, interview panels include individuals from diverse backgrounds to reduce the risk of unconscious bias.

Reasonable Adjustments:

We make reasonable adjustments to interview and assessment processes to ensure that candidates with disabilities or other protected characteristics are not disadvantaged. For example, we may provide additional time for candidates to complete assessments, allow candidates to bring support workers, or conduct interviews in accessible locations.

Avoiding Discriminatory Questions:

We do not ask questions that are based on protected characteristics or that could be used to discriminate against candidates. For example, we do not ask candidates about their age, marital status, childcare arrangements, or religious beliefs (unless such information is genuinely relevant to the role).

Selection Decisions

Objective Criteria:

Selection decisions are based on objective criteria that are directly related to the requirements of the role. We do not make decisions based on protected characteristics.

Documented Reasons:

We document the reasons for selection decisions, to ensure transparency and to enable us to identify any patterns of discrimination.

Feedback to Candidates:

We provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates upon request, to help them understand why they were not selected and to support their future applications.

Mentorship and Support

Youth Start is committed to providing mentorship and support that is tailored to the needs of each candidate and that does not discriminate on the basis of protected characteristics.

Tailored Support

Individual Needs Assessment:

We conduct an individual needs assessment for each candidate to identify their support needs, including any adjustments required due to disabilities or other protected characteristics.

Personalised Mentorship Plans:

We develop personalised mentorship plans for each candidate that take account of their individual needs, goals, and circumstances.

Regular Review:

We review mentorship plans regularly to ensure that they remain appropriate and that candidates are receiving the support they need.

Reasonable Adjustments

Identifying Adjustments:

We work with candidates to identify reasonable adjustments that will enable them to participate fully in mentorship and support activities. Adjustments may include: - Providing mentorship materials in alternative formats (such as large print or audio) - Allowing candidates to bring support workers or interpreters to mentorship sessions - Conducting mentorship sessions at accessible locations - Adjusting mentorship schedules to accommodate candidates' circumstances (such as childcare or health appointments) - Providing additional support or training to help candidates develop specific skills

Cost of Adjustments:

Youth Start bears the cost of reasonable adjustments, unless the cost would be disproportionate to the benefit. We do not pass the cost of adjustments to candidates.

Ongoing Communication:

We maintain ongoing communication with candidates to ensure that adjustments remain appropriate and that candidates are satisfied with the support they are receiving.

Inclusive Mentorship Culture

Respect and Dignity:

All mentorship is delivered with respect and dignity. Mentors treat all candidates fairly and do not discriminate on the basis of protected characteristics.

Accessible Communication:

Mentors use clear, accessible language and do not make assumptions about candidates' backgrounds, experiences, or abilities. Mentors are trained to communicate effectively with candidates from diverse backgrounds.

Cultural Sensitivity:

Mentors are trained to be culturally sensitive and to respect the diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and values of candidates. Mentors do not impose their own values or beliefs on candidates.

Confidentiality:

Mentors maintain confidentiality and do not disclose information about candidates' protected characteristics or personal circumstances without consent, except where required by law or where necessary to protect the candidate or others from harm.

Employment Practices

Youth Start is committed to ensuring that all employment practices are fair and non-discriminatory.

Terms and Conditions

Equal Pay:

We ensure that all staff members are paid equally for work of equal value, regardless of protected characteristics. We conduct regular pay reviews to identify and address any pay gaps.

Flexible Working:

We support flexible working arrangements to enable staff members to balance work and personal responsibilities. We consider all requests for flexible working fairly and do not discriminate on the basis of protected characteristics.

Leave Entitlements:

All staff members are entitled to the same leave entitlements (including annual leave, sick leave, and parental leave), regardless of protected characteristics.

Training and Development

Equal Access:

All staff members have equal access to training and development opportunities, regardless of protected characteristics.

Career Development:

We support the career development of all staff members and do not discriminate on the basis of protected characteristics in promotion decisions.

Mentoring and Sponsorship:

We provide mentoring and sponsorship to support the development of staff members from underrepresented groups.

Promotion and Progression

Objective Criteria:

Promotion decisions are based on objective criteria that are directly related to the requirements of the role. We do not make decisions based on protected characteristics.

Fair Process:

All promotion processes are fair and transparent. Candidates are informed of the criteria for promotion and are given the opportunity to apply.

Diverse Leadership:

We are committed to developing diverse leadership and ensuring that individuals from underrepresented groups have access to senior positions.

Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures

Fair Treatment:

All disciplinary and grievance procedures are applied fairly and consistently, regardless of protected characteristics. We do not discriminate in the application of disciplinary or grievance procedures.

Right to Representation:

All staff members have the right to be accompanied by a representative (such as a trade union representative or colleague) in disciplinary and grievance meetings.

Confidentiality:

All disciplinary and grievance matters are handled confidentially and information is only disclosed on a need-to-know basis.

Preventing Discrimination and Harassment

Youth Start has zero tolerance for discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.

Discrimination

Definition:

Discrimination means treating someone less favourably because of a protected characteristic. This includes direct discrimination (treating someone less favourably because they have a protected characteristic), indirect discrimination (applying a provision, criterion, or practice that puts individuals with a protected characteristic at a disadvantage), and discrimination by association or perception.

Examples:

Examples of discrimination include: - Rejecting a candidate's application because of their age - Paying a staff member less because of their sex - Refusing to promote a candidate because of their religion - Not shortlisting a candidate because they have a disability - Treating a candidate less favourably because they are pregnant

Prohibited:

Discrimination is strictly prohibited in all aspects of our recruitment, mentorship, and employment practices.

Harassment

Definition:

Harassment means unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic that violates dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.

Examples:

Examples of harassment include: - Making jokes or comments about someone's race, religion, or sexual orientation - Using derogatory language or slurs related to a protected characteristic - Displaying offensive images or materials - Making unwanted physical contact - Excluding someone

from social activities because of a protected characteristic - Making threats or intimidating behaviour related to a protected characteristic

Prohibited:

Harassment is strictly prohibited. We do not tolerate harassment in any form.

Victimisation

Definition:

Victimisation means treating someone less favourably because they have made a complaint or given evidence under the Equality Act 2010 or because they have supported someone else in making a complaint.

Examples:

Examples of victimisation include: - Dismissing a staff member because they have made a complaint of discrimination - Excluding a candidate from mentorship activities because they have complained about harassment - Refusing to promote a staff member because they have given evidence in a discrimination case

Prohibited:

Victimisation is strictly prohibited. We protect individuals who make complaints or give evidence from any adverse treatment.

Unconscious Bias

Definition:

Unconscious bias refers to attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Unconscious bias can lead to discrimination, even when we do not intend to discriminate.

Examples:

Examples of unconscious bias include: - Assuming that candidates from certain backgrounds are less capable - Assuming that individuals with disabilities cannot perform certain tasks - Assuming that individuals from certain age groups have particular characteristics or abilities - Making assumptions based on someone's appearance or accent

Addressing Unconscious Bias:

We are committed to addressing unconscious bias in our organisation. We provide training to all staff members on unconscious bias and encourage staff members to reflect on their own biases and to challenge biased behaviour in others.

Complaints and Grievances

Youth Start has a robust process for handling complaints of discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.

Making a Complaint

Right to Complain:

All candidates, employers, staff members, and other stakeholders have the right to make a complaint if they believe they have been treated unfairly or discriminated against.

How to Complain:

Complaints can be made to the Data Protection Lead (Nick Calin, contact@youthstart.co.uk, 07470435603) or through our formal grievance procedure. Complaints can be made verbally or in writing.

Informal Resolution:

We encourage individuals to raise concerns informally in the first instance, to allow for early resolution of issues. However, individuals have the right to proceed directly to a formal complaint if they prefer.

Confidentiality:

All complaints are handled confidentially. Information is only disclosed on a need-to-know basis.

No Retaliation:

We protect individuals who make complaints from any adverse treatment or retaliation. Any retaliation against an individual who has made a complaint is a serious breach of this policy and may result in disciplinary action.

Investigation Process

Prompt Investigation:

All complaints are investigated promptly. We aim to acknowledge complaints within 48 hours and to complete investigations within 14 days (or longer if the complaint is complex).

Impartial Investigation:

Investigations are conducted impartially by individuals who have no conflict of interest in the matter. Investigators have appropriate training in conducting discrimination investigations.

Right to Be Heard:

All parties to a complaint have the right to be heard and to provide evidence and witnesses.

Evidence:

Investigations are based on evidence and all parties are given the opportunity to respond to allegations.

Confidentiality During Investigation:

All information gathered during an investigation is treated confidentially and is only disclosed on a need-to-know basis.

Outcomes and Remedies

Findings:

At the conclusion of an investigation, we make findings about whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld.

Remedies:

If a complaint is upheld, we take appropriate remedial action, which may include: - An apology to the complainant - Training or counselling for the individual who engaged in the discriminatory or harassing behaviour - Changes to policies or procedures to prevent similar incidents in future - Compensation for any loss or damage suffered by the complainant - Disciplinary action against the individual who engaged in the discriminatory or harassing behaviour, up to and including dismissal

Communication of Outcome:

The outcome of an investigation is communicated to the complainant and to the individual who is the subject of the complaint. The complainant is informed of the remedial action that has been taken.

Right of Appeal:

The complainant has the right to appeal the outcome of an investigation if they believe the investigation was unfair or the findings are incorrect.

Monitoring and Reporting

Youth Start monitors its recruitment, mentorship, and employment practices to ensure compliance with this policy and equality law.

Equality Data

Collection:

We collect equality data from candidates and staff members on a voluntary basis. Candidates and staff members are not required to provide this information.

Confidentiality:

All equality data is treated confidentially and is stored securely. Equality data is only used for monitoring and reporting purposes and is not used to make decisions about individual candidates or staff members.

Analysis:

We analyse equality data to identify any patterns of discrimination and to inform improvements to our practices. We report on equality data annually.

Reporting

Annual Report:

We produce an annual report on our equality and diversity performance. The report includes: - Recruitment data (including the number of applications, shortlistings, and selections by protected characteristic) - Mentorship data (including the number of candidates receiving mentorship by protected characteristic) - Employment data (including the number of staff members by protected

characteristic, pay gaps, and promotion rates) - Complaints data (including the number of complaints received and the outcomes) - Actions taken to address any identified issues

Public Reporting:

We publish our annual equality report publicly on our website, to demonstrate our commitment to equality and transparency.

Training and Awareness

All staff members, volunteers, and contractors receive training on this policy and on equality law.

Mandatory Training

Initial Training:

All staff members, volunteers, and contractors receive training on this policy and on equality law before they start work.

Annual Refresher Training:

All staff members receive annual refresher training on this policy and on equality law.

Content:

Training covers: - The legal framework for equality (the Equality Act 2010 and other relevant legislation) - Protected characteristics - Types of discrimination, harassment, and victimisation - The importance of equality and diversity - How to prevent discrimination and harassment - How to respond to complaints - Reasonable adjustments

Unconscious Bias Training

Mandatory Training:

All staff members involved in recruitment, selection, and employment decisions receive training on unconscious bias.

Content:

Training covers: - What unconscious bias is and how it arises - Examples of unconscious bias in recruitment and employment - The impact of unconscious bias on individuals and organisations - Strategies for identifying and addressing unconscious bias

Ongoing Awareness

Communication:

We maintain ongoing communication with staff members about equality and diversity issues. We share information about equality law, case studies of discrimination, and best practice guidance.

Posters and Materials:

We display posters and other materials in our offices and on our website to raise awareness of equality and diversity.

Responsibilities

Data Protection Lead:

Nick Calin (contact@youthstart.co.uk, 07470435603) is responsible for overseeing equality and diversity, ensuring compliance with this policy and equality law, investigating complaints of discrimination, providing training and awareness, and monitoring and reporting on equality data.

All Staff Members:

All staff members are responsible for complying with this policy, treating all individuals fairly and with respect, reporting any incidents of discrimination or harassment, and supporting colleagues who have experienced discrimination.

Managers:

Managers are responsible for ensuring that their teams comply with this policy, creating an inclusive working environment, addressing any incidents of discrimination or harassment, and supporting staff members who have experienced discrimination.

Candidates and Employers:

Candidates and employers are expected to comply with this policy and to treat all individuals fairly and with respect.

Related Policies

This Equal Opportunities Policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Right to Work Policy
 - Background Checks Policy
 - Candidate Selection Policy
 - Employment Contract Policy
 - Safeguarding Policy
 - Whistleblowing Policy
 - Complaints and Dispute Resolution Policy
 - Disciplinary and Grievance Policy
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Changes to This Policy

We may update this Equal Opportunities Policy from time to time to reflect changes in equality law or our practices. We will notify relevant staff members and candidates of material changes and provide updated guidance as necessary.

Relevant Legislation

This Equal Opportunities Policy is based on the following legislation:

- Equality Act 2010
 - Employment Rights Act 1996
 - Employment Tribunals Act 1996
 - Equality and Human Rights Commission Guidance
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Contact Information

If you have questions about equal opportunities or this policy, or if you wish to make a complaint, please contact:

Data Protection Lead:

Nick Calin

Email: contact@youthstart.co.uk

Telephone: 07470435603

Youth Start Limited

Registered Office: 370 Osmaston Park Road, Derby, DE24 8FB

Equality and Human Rights Commission:

Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Helpline: 0808 800 0082

