Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

"Diversity is the secret to success in every area of the Soil Association's work. From diversity flows resilience, a better chance of responding to whatever shocks come our way, be they on the farm, in our forests, through our diets or in our businesses. To achieve that, we need diverse ways of thinking, of life experience; we need people from many different backgrounds around the table. For that to be possible, we must have an inclusive and fair culture, which respects and welcomes a range of perspectives, and which actively seeks out people who may not have had the opportunity or inclination to be part of our mission."

Helen Browning (Chief Executive, Soil Association Group)

Introduction

At the Soil Association, we help people build natural solutions together. Whether nurturing the land to grow food or nurturing individuals to develop connections in harmony with nature, our philosophy is focused on cultivating healthy connections and advocating a future that respects our environment. Together, we are a force for nature.

Our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy has been developed with this vision in mind and in line with our values of Grounded, Inclusive and Nourishing. It is a roadmap to guide and continue our diversity journey over the next three years, aligned with the People Strategic Plan that was launched at the beginning of 2024.

Our EDI strategy aims to develop a culture and working environment where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and realise their full potential. The Soil Association Group recognises our responsibility to our colleagues, partner organisations and stakeholders as well as to the wider society, we acknowledge the profound impact of embracing EDI principles in our workplace. By fostering an inclusive culture, we not only enrich the Soil Association community but also attract and retain exceptionally talented colleagues who contribute to our collective success.

We know that diverse workforces are beneficial for decision making, innovation and problem solving as people bring a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences with them. An inclusive workplace means that people feel empowered, a sense of belonging,

and that they are safe to contribute their ideas and viewpoints and to achieve their full potential.

Crucially, this strategy empowers every level of our organisation—from our board of trustees to our Group, Charity, Certification and Exchange leadership teams, our managers, and colleagues—to take direct responsibility for its implementation.

By leading by example, fostering an open dialogue, developing action plans and engaging in forums, leaders create a culture of inclusivity where diversity is celebrated. We understand that embracing and promoting EDI is an individual as well as a Group wide commitment that should underpin every aspect of our strategic plans, operations and organisational culture.

Our EDI Policy will set how we should all play our part in delivering this strategy. It is important that we each know our role in successfully developing and promoting an inclusive culture and that all our colleagues understand our commitment to diversity and our values of grounded, inclusive and nourishing.

How we deliver our impact on the world and how we can role model inclusive practices and demonstrate our EDI commitment externally is every bit as important as what we do. With our Food for Life programme, for example, by actively seeking out and collaborating with caterers from diverse backgrounds, particularly those historically underrepresented, we support the integrity and goals of the Food for Life Served Here Award. Our approach extends to inclusive menu planning, ensuring that our offerings are not only nutritious and sustainable but also cater to the diverse dietary needs and cultural tastes of the communities we support, making healthy food universally accessible.

Another example of our EDI approach to what we do is the Organic for All initiative, a visionary project aimed at making organic food affordable, available, and accessible to everyone in society. It's a response to the public's desire for healthy food that's also good for the planet, and it addresses the stark reality that while many believe everyone should have access to healthy food, few think it's currently affordable. By embedding EDI principles into our operations, we ensure that the benefits of organic food reach every segment of society, reflecting our dedication to social equity and sustainability. Our EDI commitment also guides us in forming partnerships with diverse suppliers and stakeholders who share our vision, fostering a community united in the goal of a healthier, more equitable food system. This approach with the Organic for All initiative demonstrates our proactive stance in not just advocating for organic practices, but also in championing a diverse and inclusive movement that benefits everyone.

Whilst this is primarily an internal strategy, we want to plan our projects and work to have an intentionally positive impact and be an ally to diverse communities and organisations.

We will introduce Equality Impact Assessments (evidence-based tool used to ensure that policies, procedures, practices and decision-making processes are fair and do not create barriers or disadvantage any protected groups) to our wider programme of activities, project planning and policy development to ensure this occurs.

There is a list of definitions in Appendix 1.

EDI Vision and Mission Statement

Our mission is to cultivate a culture that embraces and celebrates diversity in all its forms. Through intentional efforts, we pledge to eliminate barriers and create equal opportunities

for all members of our organisation. By embedding EDI principles into our policies, procedures, practices, and decision-making processes, we aim to develop an organisation that values diversity and recognises the strength that diversity brings. For us, the EDI values are not just ideals, but an integral part of our organisational DNA. We want to build a community where every individual feels included, valued, respected, empowered and supported to grow - whether that's growing as people, developing healthy connections with nature or joining together with others to support a nature-friendly future.

What have we done so far

We have had an ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion and have developed programmes and activities to embed and deliver that commitment. We developed our shared values to include inclusivity, they are:

Grounded	building trust from our practical, evidence-based approach
Inclusive	through exploring differences and welcoming them, we promote justice and respect
Nourishing	good things emerge from our approach - people and system grow

We have already taken significant steps towards building a robust EDI framework. In the last few years, we worked with an EDI consultant to launch the Inclusive Action Group, support networks, information and resources. A comprehensive Strategic People Plan was developed with our new Group Head of People starting in 2022, aligning our EDI efforts with our organisational goals and values and integrating them into strategic plans.

We pledged in 2022 to deliver the Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) EDI route map Towards Greater Ethnic Diversity in the Environment Sector within 5 years. The Link EDI group seeks to address the lack of diversity within the environment sector, taking collective action to understand and to help overcome barriers to delivering change. The route map intends to give direction and advice to help organisations within the environment sector to take action on improving ethnic diversity. From 2023, we participated in Racial Action for a Climate Emergency (RACE), reporting our diversity annually and the 'staff perceptions' survey every two years.

We continue to prioritise EDI initiatives with the appointment of our new EDI lead, who will develop, plan and implement our EDI strategy, ensuring that it is integrated into all aspects of our work, our culture, projects and programmes.

EDI Outcomes

The People Strategic plan includes the following EDI outcomes:

- The Soil Association has a values based diverse and inclusive culture to attract, retain and support our colleagues delivering their roles

- Diverse and inclusive principles are integrated into all our policies, procedures and employment practices in line with our values.

- Robust data gathered annually demonstrating a better understanding of our diversity profile to develop projects and initiatives to promote and ensure an inclusive and diverse organisation.

- Diverse governance boards including a Youth Advisory Board.

- Be an inclusive Employer of choice with a clear and communicated inclusive Employer Brand.
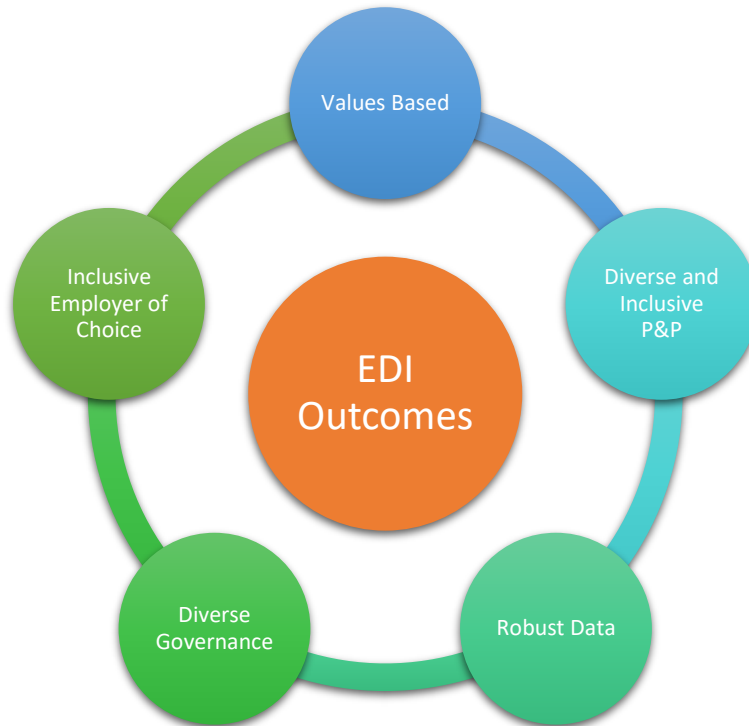
External Stakeholders

The Soil Association works with a number of external stakeholders. They include funders, government bodies, farmers and growers, partner organisations, licensees, clients, schools and communities. We want to have a positive impact on the world, and this includes in the field of equality, diversity and inclusion. We want to be role modelling our values of grounded, inclusive and nourishing in everything we do and demonstrate these values in how we manage our relationships and interact with our external stakeholders. We seek to actively include our external stakeholders' diverse views and beliefs, ensuring their access and participation in all aspects of our work wherever we can.
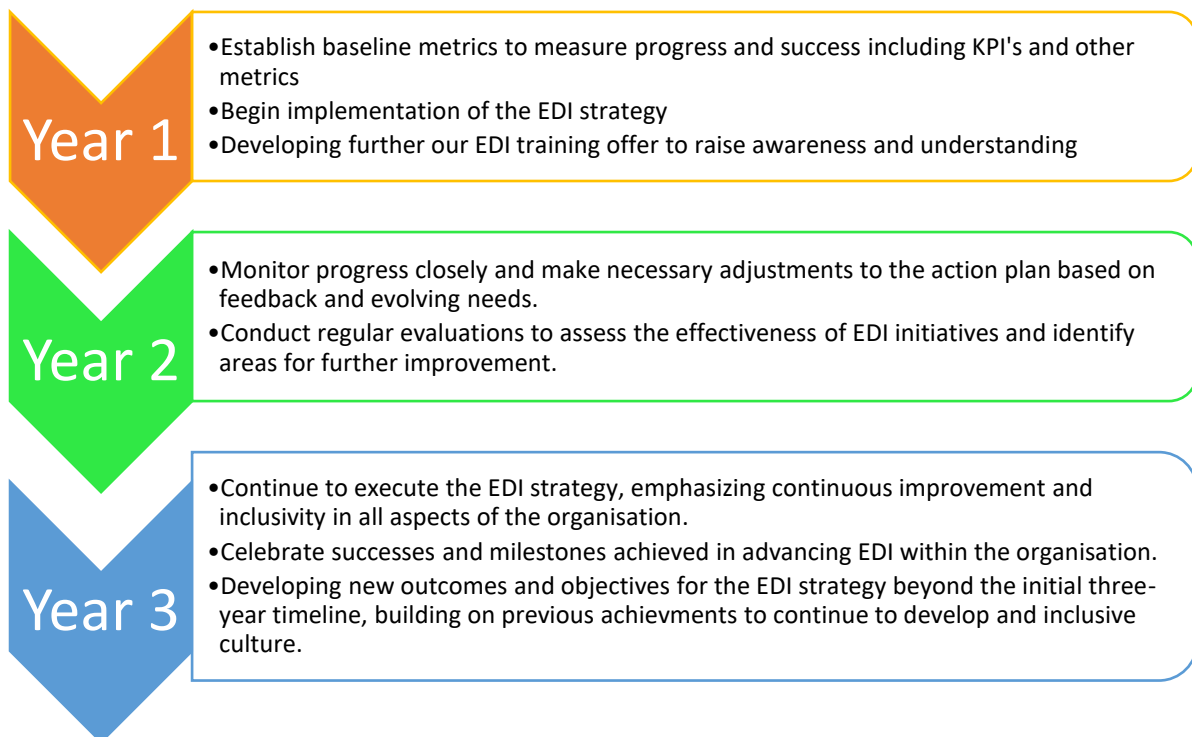
Objectives and Delivery

THEME	OBJECTIVE	HOW
Policy and Procedure Review	Plan and conduct a comprehensive review of existing policies and procedures to ensure alignment with organisational values and EDI principles and inclusion and integrate references to EDI and our values	- EDI Policy – under review - New Fertility Treatment Policy & Procedure approved and implemented. - New Menopause and Menstruation Policy approved and implemented. - New Gender Reassignment Policy and Procedure – to be written - Bereavement Policy being drafted - Review relevant policies and procedures using the equality impact assessment tool (EIA). Through a rigorous editing lens, review the content of these policies to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all colleagues.
Training and Development	Design and deliver EDI and values/culture training for all colleagues, Trustees and Committee members taking in consideration the diverse scope of roles we have in the organisation and how to cater for inclusive language.	- Review and improve mandatory EDI Training including for Induction - Mental Health for managers (delivered) - Mental Health training for colleagues (delivered) - Financial wellbeing for colleagues (delivered) - Website resource created for financial wellbeing information and resources (delivered) - Pension Planning (delivered) - Specific modules to expand on EDI Training (E.g. Neurodiversity Awareness Sessions, Unconscious bias, etc.) - Supporting informal learning opportunities that promotes an EDI approach to the way we work (shadowing, mentoring, buddy scheme for new starters, etc.)
	Management training and coaching	- PDR Training for Managers – comprehensive cover of our values and EDI approach (delivered) - "The Role of the Line Manager" training to include EDI approach - Train the Trainer: Build in EDI Approach - Ongoing People Business Partners support and coaching for managers including on EDI matters - L&D offer to align with EDI principles
	Scope out potential training modules to support Project Managers and other roles with an external stakeholder remit.	- Training on equality impact assessments, inclusive project design, ,stakeholder engagement and communication strategies

Inclusive Forums and Networks	Review the Inclusion Action Group plan for 2024/2025 and relaunch networks and support groups with clear purposes.	- New Inclusion Action Group agenda for 2024/2025 - Relaunch networks and support groups (delivered) - LINK EDI Group (strengthen partnership)
EDI Data Collection and Reporting	Promote EDI data collection and communicate the rationale behind encouraging disclosures and non-anonymous reporting.	- Collating data for RACE Report (annually) - Broaden diversity reporting to include all protected characteristics as well as others - Develop a clear rationale and communications around the reasons for collection and promoting colleague diversity data disclosure - Scope out diversity data collection for external stakeholders
Recruitment Process Review	Review the recruitment process to identify and address barriers to inclusivity, including website information, application forms, and interview practices.	- Colleague Forums and Support Networks input and feedback on the recruitment process and system. - Bristol Future Talent Work Experience input and feedback - Job Description and Person Specification template review and guidance - Blue Octopus (recruitment system) further guidance - Scope out diverse recruitment sources - Other recruitment support guidance being developed (including guidance on how to attract more diverse candidates and focus on a more inclusive selection process)
Employer Branding	To develop, evolve and promote our culture and values internally and externally as our Employer Brand - Recruitment strategy developed, incorporating best practice EDI, new brand and innovative approach to attract talented candidates from a broad pool recognising why people want to work for us and promoting our culture and values.	- Supporting commitment to demonstrate inclusive recruitment and workplace inclusion through membership of employer schemes which promote inclusivity (e.g. disability confident, mindful employer, neurodiversity smart) - To promote, communicate and embed our values internally to ensure our colleagues know what behaviours are expected from them (E.g. Soil Diversity News – EDI dedicated internal newsletter)
Diversity Initiatives	Develop and roll out diversity initiatives, such as Green Interns programmes and other work experience initiatives, to support diverse community links and skills development.	- Strengthen Bristol Future Talent Partnership (work experience for students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds) - Relaunch Green Skills Interns (UWE programme that particularly encourages applications from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse young people) - Scoping internship funding: Bristol University Internship (Funding opportunity for low income students to

		access internships), Leonard Cheshire Foundation Internships (Funding for people with disabilities) and Ambitious About Autism (Work Experience placements for those with neurodiversity conditions)
Governance Board Diversity	Develop strategies to increase diversity on governance boards	- Setting up a Youth Advisory Board - Co-opting committee members from diverse backgrounds - Work with specialist advisory groups to source quality diverse candidates for coopted and trustee positions - Support governance bodies to identify barriers to increase diversity - Actively promote the work of the Trustees through existing channels to open the awareness and opportunity to SA supporters - Collaborate with other charity partners in promoting trustee opportunities (E.g. Through LINK)

Action Plan

To effectively implement the EDI strategy within a three-year timeframe, we are developing a comprehensive annual action plan and timeline, overseen by the People Team.

Year 1
- Establish baseline metrics to measure progress and success including KPI's and other metrics
- Begin implementation of the EDI strategy
- Developing further our EDI training offer to raise awareness and understanding

Year 2
- Monitor progress closely and make necessary adjustments to the action plan based on feedback and evolving needs.
- Conduct regular evaluations to assess the effectiveness of EDI initiatives and identify areas for further improvement.

Year 3
- Continue to execute the EDI strategy, emphasizing continuous improvement and inclusivity in all aspects of the organisation.
- Celebrate successes and milestones achieved in advancing EDI within the organisation.
- Developing new outcomes and objectives for the EDI strategy beyond the initial three-year timeline, building on previous achievments to continue to develop and inclusive culture.

Communications

Throughout the implementation process, it's crucial to maintain open communications to provide support and resources and foster a culture of inclusivity and equality across the organisation.

We use diverse communication channels to regularly update our colleagues and to get their feedback on diversity initiatives and our progress. These include:

- Monthly Diversity News
- Inclusion Action Group updates and feedback
- Regular E-mail communications

Our Group Website will be updated to communicate and further promote our commitment to EDI and our values of grounded, inclusive and nourishing to our external stakeholders, including funders, clients, licensees, prospective candidates and partner organisations. A schedule of social media postings will be developed to promote our Employer Brand and EDI commitment.

Monitoring & Reporting

Key Performance Indicators will be identified and set to monitor and measure progress as well as evaluating the effectiveness of EDI initiatives, including annual diversity data collection.

These will include data from:

- o Best Companies
- o Internal EDI annual survey
- o RACE staff perceptions biannual survey
- o Internal ad hoc surveys

An annual action plan will be developed to deliver the EDI strategy outcomes and objectives.

Progress against the action plan will be reported as follows:

- Monthly to the Inclusive Action Group
- Quarterly to the Board

Biannually to Trustee Recruitment & Selection Committee (TRASC)

Appendix 1

Our definitions:

Equality

Equality is about ensuring equality of access, treatment, outcomes and impact in both employment and service delivery. It is rooted in ideas of justice and fairness and enshrined in the Equality Act 2010 which highlights that every individual must have an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents. It is also the belief that no one should have poorer life chances because of their background, personal identity or experience.

Diversity

Diversity is the differences in race, ethnicity, abilities, age, gender, beliefs, interests, socioeconomic (class), marital or partnership status, sexual orientation, geographic, academic/professional backgrounds, opinions, backgrounds, thinking, experiences and many other characteristics. Diversity recognises that everyone is different in a variety of visible and non-visible ways, and that those differences are to be recognised, respected, valued, promoted and celebrated. They may include, but are not limited to, differences protected by equalities law.

Inclusion

Inclusion is the practice of including people in a way that is fair for all, values everyone's differences, and empowers and enables each person to be themselves and achieve their full potential and thrive at work. An inclusive workplace culture is one in which everyone feels that they belong through feeling safe in being themselves, that their contribution matters, policies and practices are fair, and a diverse range of people are supported to work together effectively. To achieve genuine inclusion there must be positive action, including but not limited to, measures under the Equality Act 2010 to address past, present and potential discrimination and barriers to enable and empower: equal access, opportunities, treatment, resources, outcomes and impact.