

**GUIDE
DOGS**



**Access to educational institutions
for guide dog owners**

Introduction

This leaflet contains information and advice for Local Educational Authorities and Board of governors and staff of educational institutions regarding how they can help make their institutions accessible for guide dog owners to make the learning experience enjoyable, safe and at the same time maintain the dignity and independence of pupils with a guide dog.

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (Guide Dogs) aims to enhance the mobility, independence and quality of life of blind and partially sighted people by providing guide dogs and other services.

Guide dogs are working dogs, not pets, and their owners rely on them for both independence and mobility. Guide dogs have up to two years of intensive training and receive further training throughout their working lives. In addition, guide dog owners are given training on how to maintain the extremely high standards of grooming which the dogs require and the dogs are checked regularly by vets.

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the Royal Environmental Health Institute Scotland have confirmed that guide dogs and other assistance dogs should be allowed entry to restaurants, canteens and other food related establishments as their very special training means that they are unlikely to be a risk to hygiene in these premises.

In practical terms, guide dogs do not disrupt the everyday operation of businesses or premises. They are trained to sit at their owner's feet at all times, not to climb on furniture and not to bother other people.

What the law says

Disabled people including guide dog owners and other blind or partially sighted people have important rights under the Equality Act 2010, or Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland. The Equality Act 2010 consolidates and replaces previous discrimination legislation including the Disability Discrimination Act in England, Wales and Scotland.

The Equality Act and DDA in Northern Ireland provides for blind and partially sighted people to have the same right to services such as educational institutions, restaurants/canteens and other leisure/recreational facilities as everyone else.

It includes a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people can access services. This includes amending a 'no dogs' policy to allow guide dogs and other assistance dogs.

In relation to education, the law requires that educational establishments cannot unlawfully discriminate against pupils because of their sex, race, disability, religion or belief and sexual orientation. There have been some changes to the law which have an impact on schools and directly related to guide dog owners:

The Act has 3 requirements:

- The first is to provide reasonable adjustment which is anticipatory
- The second to plan to increase access to premises and the curriculum
- The third refers to auxiliary aids and services. Where a pupil is at substantial disadvantage, a school is required to take appropriate action to provide the relevant auxiliary aid.

Staff at educational institutions should not refuse access to a disabled person or provide them with a lower standard of service because of their disability. Staff may also need to make reasonable adjustments to the way in which they deliver their services to make sure that they do not discriminate against a disabled pupil.

A guide dog owner who wishes to attend a school with their guide dog should not be refused due to the fact that they are blind or partially sighted, or that they have a guide dog with them. It is the service provider's responsibility to provide the same level of service to disabled people that they would provide to other members of the public and to make any necessary reasonable adjustments in order to be able to do so.

Reasonable adjustments may include:

- Providing information in alternative formats such as Braille, audio or large print.
- Exploring policies and procedures to allow a guide dog to accompany it's owner to school
- Reading out information that may change regularly.
- Providing a tactile plan of the institution to aid orientation.
- Providing a sighted guide and assistance.

When considering reasonable adjustments it is recommended to ask individual guide dog owners and other blind or partially sighted people, what assistance they would require to be able to access and benefit from the facilities within the institution.

This may include:

- Training staff to work with disabled people and to provide appropriate adjustments e.g. providing assistance with tasks where the guide dog owner would require assistance e.g. in the lab and providing sighted guide and assistance for that specific task.
- Providing a sighted guide when required by the guide dog owner to areas where the guide dog owner would prefer not to take the dog.
- Providing a safe secure place where a guide dog can be left should the guide dog owner prefer not to take the dog.
- Putting management practice in place where issues around allergies or fear of dogs have been identified.

Religious considerations

Religious grounds cannot be used to exclude guide dog and assistance dog owners. Religious or cultural beliefs can raise sensitive issues relating to dogs. However, the Equality and Human Rights Commission successfully reached agreement on this with a number of religious groups including the Muslim Shariat Council. (See 'Know Your Rights! Assistance Dog Owners' DRC, 2003). Guide Dogs staff can also advise on this.

Making general provision for blind and partially sighted people within the leisure facility

To make your premises more accessible to blind and partially sighted people:

Externally

- Ensure the entrance is clearly signed and highlighted from the surrounding walls.
- The route to the entrance is clear and easy to find and follow, with any potential obstructions removed, or clearly highlighted if they cannot be removed.
- Tactile paving surfaces may be required to provide warning at a dropped kerb road crossing or at the approach to steps encountered along the route; or to provide guidance for instance if the entrance is not on the direct route. The appropriate tactile paving should be used - see 'Guidance on the use of tactile paving surfaces' in useful publications section.
- Provide appropriate taxi / car drop off point near the entrance to enable blind and partially sighted people to find the entrance easily.

Internally

- Choose décor with good colour contrast and lighting.
- Make sure that all the circulation routes are free of hazards, e.g. planters or seating.
- Ensure that glazed walls and doors have been highlighted appropriately.
- Display good signage which is legible. The signs should have contrasting features i.e. good contrast between the text and its background, in the recommended size and font. (See 'Sign Design Guide' in 'Useful publications' section). They should also contrast clearly with the surroundings in which they are positioned.
- Provide information in alternative formats for pupils, e.g. Braille, audio and large print.
- Provide audible alarms and systems.

Additional provision and assistance for guide dog owners and their dogs

- Change policy and practice to amend a 'no-dogs' policy to allow access for guide and other assistance dogs.
- Never distract or harass the dog. Check with the owner before any contact is to be made.
- Never feed the dog. Guide dogs are working dogs and are fed a strict diet at regular times; any additional food may cause the dog to be sick or adversely affect its health in other ways.
- Provide a water bowl for the dog if requested by the guide dog owner.
- In seating areas ensure there is sufficient space for a guide dog under a table or in a corner so that it can remain with its owner.
- Provide an appropriate relief (spending) area for guide dogs and other assistance dogs. Where this is located outside the institution staff support may be needed to guide the owner to the area.

An advisory leaflet is available on the provision of spending facilities, and Guide Dogs' staff can advise on the provision and location of suitable facilities.

The best place for a guide dog is with its owner, who will have both the skills and the relationship with their dog that ensures a high level of control. However, while they may need their guide dog to accompany them to the institution, there may be activities which guide dog owners may wish to take part in without their dog.

Management practices should be in place to provide sighted guide assistance if required to areas where the dog is not able to accompany the owner e.g. Laboratory activities; and a suitable location identified and agreed with the guide dog owner where the guide dog can be safely left. This should be a room away from visitors and students with a member of staff in or near the room to ensure the safety of the guide dog. This area should be quiet and at room temperature. If possible visibility between the guide dog and its owner is useful. Guide Dogs staff may be able to assist in identifying a suitable location.

Remember that a guide dog owner is no different from any other pupil in the institution. They should be treated with the same level of hospitality and courtesy afforded to all pupils.

How to communicate with blind and partially sighted people and provide sighted guidance

- Staff should know how to communicate with blind and partially sighted people and provide sighted guide support. This should be addressed through disability awareness training for all current and new staff.
- Tell the blind or partially sighted person who you are and what your role is in the institution.
- When addressing a person with a guide dog, speak to the person, not the dog.
- Ask the person what assistance is needed rather than making assumptions as to what might be required.
- If the person asks to be guided to another part of the institution, stand by the person's side and allow them to take hold of your arm/elbow in order to guide them along. Staff should not take hold of the person and drag or push them in a particular direction.
- When guiding a person with a guide dog, stand by the person's right hand side (usually the guide dog will be on the left) and adopt the same procedure as above. Never take hold of a guide dog's lead or harness and if the owner tells the dog to do something do not interfere as this may confuse the guide dog.
- When guiding a blind or partially sighted person through the building or outdoors, tell the person where they are going and what obstacles or hazards might be approaching. They need to be told in advance about doors opening towards or away from them and about steps, kerbs or slopes going up or down to allow them time to adjust to their surroundings. This should prevent accident and injury.
- It is helpful, and may also be legally required as a reasonable adjustment, to explain the layout of the facility to a blind or partially sighted person and when doing this, remember to ask the person what information might be useful before bombarding them with too much detail. Explain room layouts (classrooms, staff room, toilets etc) in a simple way by asking the blind or partially sighted person to stand with their back against the entrance door and then talking them through the picture which is now in front of them. For instance: "The classrooms are to the left and toilets on the right hand side, the door leading to the science block is straight ahead". If there are any potentially dangerous items, e.g. fire extinguishers or protruding radiators, tell the person where they are and what they are. Items which may cause a trip hazard (cables, rugs etc) should be removed where possible or placed against a wall to minimise risk.
- Good communication is vital for all visitors but even more so for blind and partially sighted people. Where possible, information should be provided in the requested format so that they are not excluded.

Emergency evacuation

Current legislation and standards state that all people should be evacuated if there is a fire. It is the responsibility of the management to ensure their safe escape by introducing suitable escape plans.

Emergency evacuation procedures should include:

- Ensure all fire exits are clearly signed and free of obstruction (internally and externally).
- Ensure an escape strategy is in place in your institution.
- Explain the emergency procedure to blind and partially sighted visitors and pupils on arrival, and make the information available in alternative formats.
- Train staff to deal with emergency procedures.

For more information see 'Means of Escape for Disabled People' (in 'Useful publications' section).

Useful publications

'Know Your Rights! Assistance Dog Owners'

(DRC SP8, January 2003)

'Equality Act: new auxiliary aids duty applies to schools from 1st September'

(Optimus Education – Expert guidance and essential information for education professionals, August 2012)

'Means of Escape for Disabled People'

(Department for Communities and Local Government, endorsed by Disability Rights Commission, 2007)

'Fire Evacuation Briefing'

(Disability Rights Commission publication, 06/02/2003)

'Guidance on the use of tactile paving surfaces'

(Department for Transport, 1998)

'Guidance on the provision of spending facilities for assistance dogs'

(Guide Dogs, 2008)

'Sighted Guide: How to help blind and partially sighted people'

(Guide Dogs, 2008)

'Sign Design Guide: A guide to inclusive signage'

(JMU Access Partnership, RNIB and the Sign Design Society) available from RNIB.

Contact details for Guide Dogs

For further information, please contact Guide Dogs

Guide Dogs

Hillfields
Burghfield Common
Reading
RG7 3YG

Tel: 0845 241 2178

Fax: 0118 983 5433

The advice in this information booklet relates to educational institutions. Many educational institutions have restaurants or canteens. Separate information on access to hotels and food premises can be obtained from Guide Dogs Mobility Teams. The information given in this document was correct at the time of printing. This document provides basic information and is not a substitute for legal advice.

The information provided in this booklet about access for guide dogs and their owners, also applies to other registered assistance dogs.

Contact details for assistance dog organisations

Assistance Dogs (UK)

C/o Hearing Dogs for Deaf People

The Grange
Wycombe Road
Saunderton
Princes Risborough
Buckinghamshire
HP27 9NS

Tel: 01844 348 100

Fax: 01844 348 101

Canine Partners

Mill Lane
Heyshott
Midhurst
West Sussex
GU29 0ED

Tel: 08456 580 480

Fax: 08456 580 481

Email: info@caninepartners.co.uk
www.caninepartners.co.uk

Dogs for the Disabled

The Frances Hay Centre
Blacklocks Hill
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX17 2BS

Tel: 08700 776 600

Fax: 08700 776 601

Email: info@dogsforthedisabled.org
www.dogsforthedisabled.org

Hearing Dogs for Deaf People

The Grange
Wycombe Road
Saunderton
Princes Risborough
Buckinghamshire
HP27 9NS

Tel: 01844 348 100

Fax: 01844 348 101

Email: info@hearingdogs.org.uk
www.hearing-dogs.co.uk

Support Dogs

21, Jessops Riverside
Brightside Lane
Sheffield
S9 2RX

Tel: 0870 609 3476

Fax: 0114 261 7555

Email: supportdogs@btconnect.com
www.support-dogs.org.uk

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