



Aston University Guidance on Assistance Animals

1. Introduction

Aston University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for its student body and work force. Aston University provides information for disabled students on the [Disability and Neurodiversity Support Team pages](#) on the website. More information on support for disabled staff can be found on the [HR website](#).

This Guidance is to address specific issues relating to assistance dogs while on the University campus. It is also intended to raise awareness for students, staff and visitors of the issues relating to assistance animals.

This Guidance aims to outline:

- The arrangements made to provide a welcoming and safe environment for assistance dogs and their owners.
- The roles and responsibilities within the University in relation to assistance dogs.
- The responsibilities of the owners of assistance dogs on University property.
- A process for dealing with issues and complaints if they arise.

More information on the definition of an assistance dog, as used in this Guidance, can be found in **Appendix 1**.

a. Emotional Support Animals

Emotional Support Animals are not recognised as certified assistance animals in the UK. This means that the rules that apply to other assistance animals, such as guide dogs, do not apply to emotional support animals. The University is unable to accommodate requests for emotional support animals to be brought into any of the University buildings. Aston University does not own any student accommodation, students will need to contact their accommodation provider directly to discuss this with them.

2. University Facilities and Arrangements

These facilities and arrangements allow students, staff, and visitors with assistance dogs to have the best possible experience whilst on the University premises:

- A spending facility is a sectioned area where assistance dogs can relieve themselves (for further information contact the Enabling Team).
- Water facilities will need to be provided by the assistance dog owner.
- On request, the University will provide familiarisation with and orientation on campus as part of induction.
- Guidelines for students and staff on how to interact with assistance dogs can be found in **Appendix 2**.

3. Aston University's Roles and Responsibilities

a. Estates

Estates and Grounds & Gardens staff will ensure the upkeep of Spending Pens are sufficient to ensure the health of the dog and the safety of the owner, including the provision of bins for dog refuse and the disposal of the refuse.

b. Disability and Neurodiversity Support Team

The Disability and Neurodiversity Support team will advise students with assistance dogs and signpost them to this Guidance to make them aware of the help provided by the University and their rights and responsibilities. If required, the Disability and Neurodiversity Support team will liaise with the student's academic department to ensure that any reasonable adjustments have been made.

c. Line managers

Line Managers will ensure that staff with an assistance dog are aware of this policy, including their own responsibilities and will work together with the member of staff to arrange any reasonable adjustments required. Line Managers will also ensure that other members of staff respond appropriately to the member of staff and the assistance dog. The University Human Resources department will provide support to Line Managers in addressing any issues that arise.

4. The Owner's Roles and Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the assistance dog owner to ensure:

- The dog is kept on a lead at all times when walking around the University premises.
- The dog uses the Spending Pens provided by the University and does not allow it to foul the University paths or grounds. When physically able, the owner will clean up after the dog using dog poo bags and use the bin provided in the pen.
- The dog's requirements in relation to toileting and feeding requirements are met.
- The dog always behaves in an appropriate manner and does not disrupt others.
- In the unlikely event that the dog does foul inside University buildings, that this is reported to an appropriate member of staff to make arrangements with the Estates department to clean and sanitise the area.

5. Complaints and or breaches of the policy

a. Complaints by assistance dogs' owners

If a student or member of staff with an assistance dog wishes to make a complaint about the treatment of themselves or their dog, they should raise this issue with the department in which the problematic treatment occurred. For example, if the problem occurs in the learning environment it should be raised with the relevant academic department. The department in question will then investigate the issue.

The University will attempt to resolve the matter informally, including where appropriate the use of mediation. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, the issue will be escalated and dealt with through staff or student disciplinary procedures, with reference to the Equality Act 2010.

If problems occur in student accommodation, it should be raised with the accommodation provider who will have their own policy.

b. Complaints about assistance dogs

If a student or member of staff wishes to make a complaint about an assistance dog or notices any breaches of this Guidance, they should raise the issue with the department in which the problem occurred.

Every attempt will be made to resolve the matter informally with the dog's owner, including where appropriate the use of mediation. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, or if the request to resolve the complaint is not complied with, the issue will be escalated and dealt with through staff or student disciplinary procedures.

1. Appendix 1 - Definitions

Assistance Dogs (UK) is a coalition of assistance dog organisations that encourages the exchange of ideas and best practice amongst its members, raises awareness amongst the general public and promotes behavioural and legislative changes to ensure the freedom, independence and rights of its clients. This Guidance refers to the definitions and types of assistance dogs provided on its [website](#).

a. Definition of Assistance Dog

For the purpose of this Guidance, an assistance dog is one which has been specifically trained to assist disabled people and which has been qualified by one of the organisations registered as a member of Assistance Dogs (UK) or an equivalent organisation in another country.

Assistance dogs trained by members of Assistance Dogs (UK) or by an equivalent organisation in another country, have formal identification and are permitted to accompany their owners at all times and in all places within the United Kingdom (unless there is a genuine health and safety risk).

On the grounds of Health and Safety responsibilities to its staff, students and visitors, the University reserves the right to refuse access for:

- Dogs which are not qualified by one of the five membership organisations of Assistance Dogs (UK).

- Dogs from other nations, which do not meet the full membership criteria of the established international assistance dog organisations – Assistance Dogs International, Assistance Dogs Europe, International Guide Dog Federation – or other such international bodies as may from time to time be recognised.

b. Types of Assistance Dogs

- **Guide Dogs** assist people who are blind or are visually impaired.
- **Hearing Dogs for Deaf people** assist people who are deaf or are hearing impaired.
- **Diabetes Alert Dogs** trained to detect high or low levels of blood sugar in humans with diabetes and alert their owners to dangerous changes in blood glucose levels.
- **Psychiatric assistance/service dog** is a sub-category of assistance dog trained to assist their handler with a psychiatric disability or a mental disability.
- **Support Dogs/Dogs for the Disabled** can be trained to do many other tasks, which their owner may find difficult or impossible for example:
 - Opening and closing doors.
 - Calling an ambulance.
 - Picking up objects.
 - Assisting with dressing and undressing.
 - Accompanying their owner whilst shopping etc.
 - Acting as a physical support.
 - Raising the alarm.
 - Operating control buttons.
 - Switching lights on and off.
 - Carrying items.
 - Loading and unloading the washing machine.
 - Fetching the telephone and other items.

c. Assistance Dogs UK Member Organisations

The registered charities that form Assistance Dogs (UK) can be found using this link: [Find an Assistance Dog Charity - ADUK \(assistancedogs.org.uk\)](http://assistancedogs.org.uk)

Support Dogs also train dogs for people with disabilities and Seizure Alert dogs for people with Epilepsy. Seizure Alert dogs are trained to behave differently when they detect a potential seizure, which may appear to be misbehaving.

2. Appendix 2 - Tips for Interacting with Assistance/Service Dogs

- **DO** speak to the owner/handler rather than the dog.

The service dog and the handler are a team. If you want to talk to them, always speak to the person first rather than automatically approaching the dog. Remember, the animal is working, and the human's life could depend on the dog staying focused on the job.

- **DON'T** touch the dog without asking permission first.

Touching or petting a working dog is a distraction and may prevent them from tending to the human partner. The dog may be in the process of completing a command or direction given by the human, and you shouldn't interfere.

Fortunately, most service dogs are trained to stay in work mode until they receive a release command from their handler. That's why many service dogs are able to ignore outside influences.

- **DON'T** offer food to a service dog.

Many service dogs are on strict, healthy diets to keep their working lives long, and they may also have allergies that you are not aware of. It also can break the dog's training if they learn that they get food in a public place.

- **DO** treat the owner/handler with sensitivity and respect.

Asking a service dog's handler personal questions about their disability can be disrespectful and an invasion of privacy. Assume the service dog team can handle things themselves but if you sense they could use your help, ask first. And don't take it personally if your offer is rejected, as there's usually a good reason.

- **DON'T** assume a napping service dog is off duty.

All dogs nap, including working dogs. When her handler is sitting or standing for some length of time, it's perfectly natural and appropriate for a service dog to catch a few winks. The dog is still technically at work, however, so all dos and don'ts remain in effect.

- **DO** inform the handler if a service dog approaches you.

If a working dog approaches you, sniffs or nudges you, etc., politely let the handler know. Resist the urge to respond to the dog — the handler will correct the dog.

- **DON'T** assume service dogs never get to 'just be dogs'.

Working dogs typically get plenty of relaxation, rest and playtime. When they're home and out of their "work clothes," they're free to behave like any other dog. Since the jobs these wonderful animals do are often challenging and stressful, their handlers recognise they need plenty of downtime and exercise.

Deb Tovey 19/10/2023. Updated by Dylan Griffiths 09/08/2024.