

# ADUK QUICK GUIDE



## **Welcoming Employees with Assistance Dogs in the Workplace**

[www.assistedogs.org.uk](http://www.assistedogs.org.uk) | Registered Charity 1119538

## Assistance Dogs UK

Assistance Dogs UK is a coalition of assistance dog charities that have been accredited by one of the two leading global authorities in the assistance dog industry, namely Assistance Dogs International and The International Guide Dog Federation.

Assistance dogs are dogs that have been highly trained to carry out a range of tasks and alerts in order to support a disabled person or person with a long-term medical condition.

More and more employers are considering making their place of work dog friendly. Alongside this, it is important to distinguish between allowing employees to bring their pet dogs to work, and the legal obligations that employers have regarding disabled employees who rely on an assistance dog.

If an employer is considering becoming more pet friendly, they might want to consider how having multiple dogs in the workplace will impact an assistance dog and their handler.



## The Law

In the UK Disabled people have important rights under the Equality Act 2010 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Northern Ireland). It is unlawful for public services, service providers and local authorities to treat disabled people less favourably, e.g. refusing services or offering less services because a disabled person has an assistance dog.

The law states that anyone offering a service, be that private business or public service must make **reasonable adjustments** for disabled people, so that they can access their venue, goods and services. Except in the most exceptional circumstance e.g. a surgical or disease control hospital ward, this would mean allowing access to a disabled person and their assistance dog, even if you do not normally accept pet dogs.

## Reasonable Adjustments

An employer is required to make reasonable adjustments to enable a disabled employee with an assistance dog to attend their workplace and carry out their job. These could include:

- Making space for the dog and its bed, potentially moving a workstation to a quieter part of the office/space.
- Providing or allocating an outside space or 'spending area' where the dog can relieve itself (if outside space is available).
- Making changes to working hours to accommodate short breaks to allow the dog to have a comfort break.

It is important to remember that not every person with an assistance dog has a visible disability and not all assistance dogs will look the same. Unless the information is needed in order to make reasonable adjustments, it is not appropriate to question an employee about the nature of their disability.

## Staff and Customers Allergies and Concerns

To ensure equitable access to the workplace, it is good practice to discuss potential barriers with other staff and volunteers.

Allergy to dogs is sometimes given as a reason to not welcome assistance dogs into the workplace. While the prevalence of allergies generally is increasing worldwide, in the UK it is estimated that only 8% of adults are sensitive to dog allergens.

Where a clear allergy risk to a specific individual team member is identified by an employer, reasonable steps should be taken to reduce this risk, but a refusal of access for an employee with an assistance dogs based on the possibility that some people 'may' be allergic is unlikely to be classed as a justifiable response.

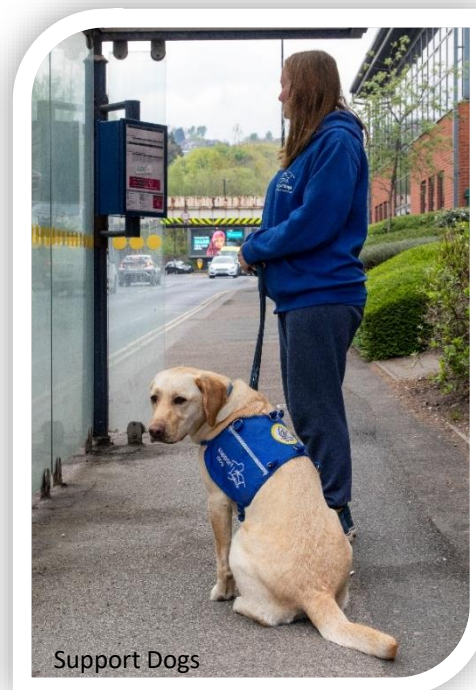
Disabled people should not bear the cost of any additional cleaning or staffing that would result in reducing risk.

Refusing access to an assistance dog user in the workplace due to fear of dogs amongst other employees is unlikely to be considered a justifiable response.

## What to Expect

Assistance dogs are trained to wait quietly until they are needed. On average, dogs sleep/rest between 12 – 14 hours per day so once a dog has settled into its routine then you will most likely find that it will be in its bed resting or sleeping until it is called upon to respond.

Not all assistance dogs are trained by an ADUK member charity, but all assistance dogs should be **highly trained** by whoever does train them, whether that be a non-accredited charity, a professional trainer or individual.



The Equality & Human Rights Commission states that assistance dogs should be highly trained and will;

- be trained to behave well in public
- have safe and reliable temperaments
- be healthy and do not constitute a hygiene risk
- be fully toilet-trained
- be recognisable by the harness, organisation-specific coat, lead slip or ID (though this is not a legal requirement)

## Unexpected Behaviour

No assistance dog, no matter how highly trained and experienced is going to be perfect 100% of the time. Whilst they are trained to focus on their partner, from time to time they may be distracted. However, there are some behaviours that you would not expect to see;

- dogs that have not been trained to behave well in public e.g. barking, lunging, or jumping up or pulling strongly on a lead
- dogs with aggressive or very fearful temperaments e.g. cowering or growling
- poorly cared for dogs that constitute a hygiene risk
- dogs that are not toilet trained

## Identifying Assistance Dogs

Although most assistance dogs are recognisable by their jacket, harness, lead slip, or bandana there is no legal requirement for them to wear these. Some people may choose not to use these visual cues and legally, they are within their rights.

This lack of visible identification can create challenges in easily distinguishing assistance dogs from pet dogs.

All assistance dogs trained by an ADUK member organisation are issued with an ADUK ID Booklet or Assistance Dogs International App containing details about the dog and the charity that trained it.

Not all assistance dog owners have trained their dog through a charity or carry specific ID, nor are they required to by law. There is no official register or certification process for assistance dogs in the UK so there is no legal 'proof' that you can ask for.



## Refusing Access

It may be unlawful to refuse access to a disabled person with an assistance dog because it has not been trained by an ADUK member. However, it could be considered reasonable, as part of meeting a duty of care to staff and customers, for an employer to seek reassurance that the assistance dog is highly trained and appropriately insured.

ADUK recommends treating each person as an individual and if they assert that they are disabled and that their dog is a highly trained assistance dog, and the dog acts as expected, it may be unlawful to deny them access.

If it becomes evident that the dog is not behaving in line with the list of expected behaviours outlined by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, refusing or revoking employment or access may be justifiable.

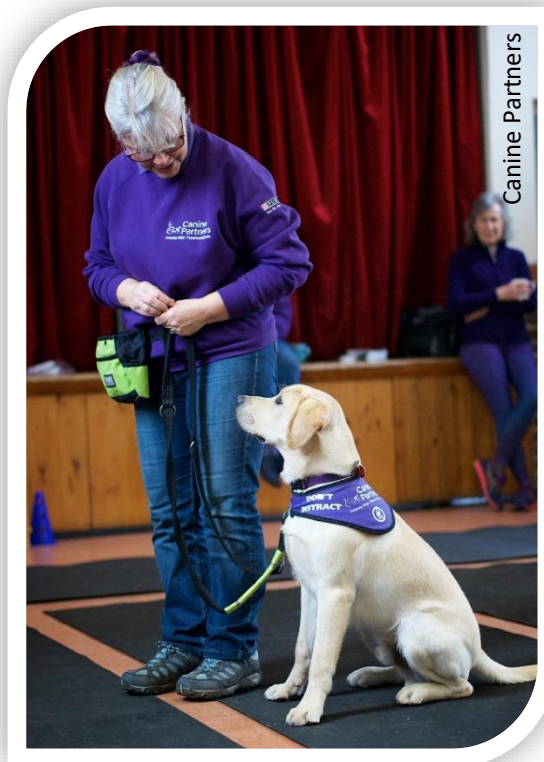
## Assistance Dogs in Training

In order to prepare a dog for life working as an assistance dog, its vital that they are exposed to a range of different environments and situations.

ADUK members can take up to 2 years to prepare and train an assistance dog. Whilst there is nothing in the law about the age a highly trained assistance dog must be, it would be unlikely that a dog under a year old would be adequately prepared for the role.

Assistance Dogs in training are not referenced in the relevant legislation.

As such it is ADUK's understanding that service providers are not legally obliged to give access to someone with an Assistance Dog in training.



## Emotional Support Dogs

An assistance dog is a highly trained dog that is prepared and trained to carry out tasks and alerts to mitigate a person's disabilities or life threatening health condition. An emotional support dog is dogs that offers comfort and companionship by being present, which requires no specialist training.

Emotional support dogs are not referenced in law, so it is ADUK's understanding that service providers are not legally obliged to allow access to someone with an emotional support dog in the same way that they would do a disabled person with a highly trained assistance dog.

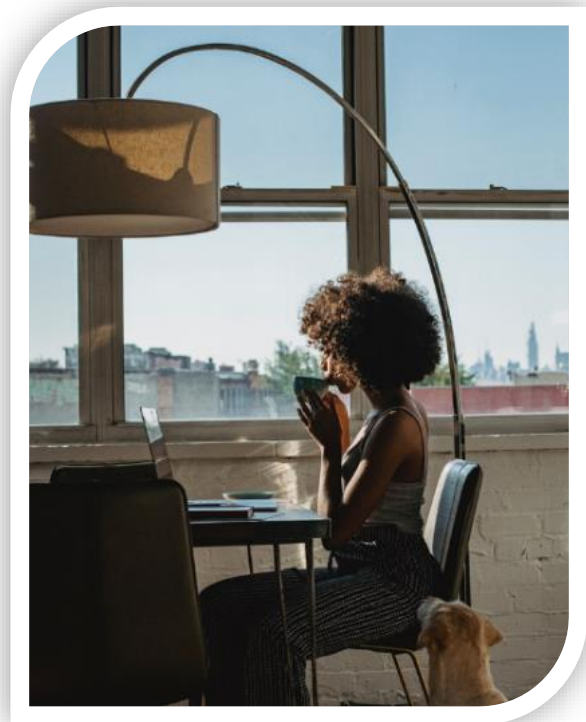
Emotional support dogs and highly trained psychiatric assistance dogs are not the same thing. A disabled person who relies on a highly trained assistance dog to mitigate a mental health condition should be given access in the same way that a physically disabled person with an assistance dog would.

## Case Study 1: Tash

Tash works in a design office in the city. She was recently partnered with an assistance dog and plans for the dog to accompany her to work.

### Reasonable Adjustment:

Tash's employer is aware of their legal obligations and makes the reasonable adjustment necessary for Tash to be accompanied by her assistance dog. Tash's desk was right by a busy entrance, so her desk is moved to a quieter space that has ample room for a dog bed.



However, the employer does not allow Tash adequate breaks to toilet the dog and there is no spending area provided nearby. Tash uses all her breaks to meet the dog's needs and is unable to meet her own needs properly, such as taking a proper lunch break.

Being more flexible about Tash's break times would mean that she has more time to meet her own needs and thrives at work. Employers should consider the wider needs of the person and their assistance dog and make reasonable adjustments wherever possible.

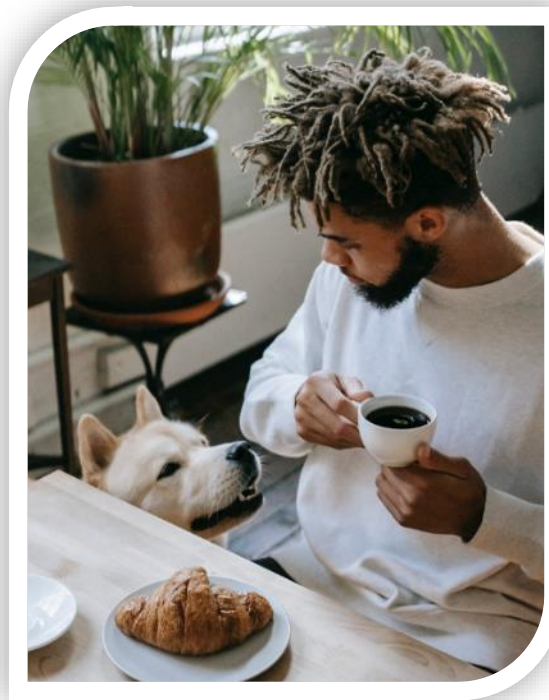
## Risk Assessment

Risk	Controls in Place	Risk Rating	Allocated Person
<i>Assistance Dog in the office</i>	<i>Employees desk moved to an area with space for a dog bed</i>	3	Joe
<i>Assistance Dog has an accident at work</i>	<i>Dog insurance and public liability insurance are in place</i>	2	Tash

## Case Study 2: Tom

Tom has started a new job as a data analyst in a large office complex. Tom has a medical alert dog and needs to be accompanied by his dog at all times.

**Reasonable Adjustment:** Tom's employer speaks to him about his needs. The employer welcomes Tom and his medical alert dog into work and arranges for Tom's colleagues to have training about interacting with assistance dogs.



However, the office-building management company tell Tom that he cannot take his medical alert dog into the staff canteen, so Tom ends up buying lunch from a local convenience store and eating outside. Tom is now unable to take advantage of discounted food and a warm inside space to spend his breaks making connections with new colleagues.

There is no reason for Tom and his assistance dog to be refused access to the staff canteen and this refusal puts Tom at a disadvantage to his colleagues. Disabled people with assistance dogs should not have their access resisted by being expected to sit in pet friendly areas or outside.

## Assistance Dogs Around Food

Highly trained assistance dogs are recognised by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, which states that assistance dogs should be allowed access to premises where food is available.

There is no conflict with food hygiene laws in allowing access for assistance dogs. Due to the very specific training and health tests that highly trained assistance dogs go through, certainly by dogs trained by ADUK members, they are unlikely to be a risk to hygiene in such premises. This would not include areas where food is prepared for sale such as professional kitchens.



## Additional Sources of Information

For further details about welcoming disabled people who rely on assistance dogs see The Equality and Human Rights Commissions:

Assistance Dogs: [A Guide for All Businesses](#)

## Other ADUK Quick Guides and Resources

- Welcoming Guests with Assistance Dogs in Holiday Accommodation
- Welcoming Assistance Dogs in the Workplace
- Welcoming Tenants with Assistance Dogs in Rented Accommodation
- Welcoming Assistance Dogs in Schools
- Welcoming Students with Assistance Dogs in Further & Higher Education
- Welcoming ADUK Member Trained Dogs Poster
- 'What is an Assistance Dog' Animation
- 'Service Providers & Employers Guide to Assistance Dogs' Animation

Find out more about ADUK, its members and watch our animation at [www.assistancedogs.org.uk](http://www.assistancedogs.org.uk)



## Contact Assistance Dogs UK

**Email:** [info@assistancedogs.org.uk](mailto:info@assistancedogs.org.uk)

**Web:** [www.assistancedogs.org.uk](http://www.assistancedogs.org.uk)

**Write to us:** Assistance Dogs (UK), c/o Hearing Dogs for Deaf People  
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