Staff Guide: Assistance Dogs

Introduction

The University of Kent recognises and celebrates the diversity of its staff, students, alumni and visitors or members of the public.

Legal framework

The Equality Act 2010 requires that reasonable adjustments are made for disabled staff, including assistance dog owners.

Definition of an assistance dog

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

Assistance Dogs (UK) requires that individuals receive comprehensive training in all aspects of dog behaviour, training and welfare in order to safely handle their assistance dog in a full variety of situations.

Types of assistance dogs

Guide Dogs: assist people who are blind or are visually impaired.

Hearing Dogs: assist people who are deaf or hearing impaired.

Support Dogs/Dogs for the Disabled are trained to carry out tasks which their owner may find difficult or impossible, for example:

- Opening and closing doors
- Picking up objects
- Acting as a physical support
- Raising an alarm
- Operating control buttons such as switching lights on and off
- Carrying items, or fetching a telephone or other items
- Assisting with dressing/undressing.

Responsibilities

The following information has been developed to provide a welcoming, supportive and effective environment for employees with assistance dogs, and to ensure clear lines of responsibility.

Line manager to:

- Provide a welcoming environment for the employee and their assistance dog.
• Consult with the individual in order to provide a suitable and safe location for the assistance dog, and the individual, close to the employee’s workstation if possible. Generally, the location should be draught-free, of suitable temperature and away from machinery, light or noise that may cause disruption to the dog.

• Facilitate toileting for the assistance dog, and other wellbeing breaks as required.

• Communicate with staff ahead of the assistance dog’s arrival, and make appropriate plans to help create an inclusive workplace culture for the employee and colleagues. It is advisable to consult with the individual in advance of any communications and care should be taken to respect their confidentiality needs, particularly if the disability or health condition that the assistance dog supports is non-visible.

• Handle any questions or concerns, liaising with their HR Employee Relations Adviser as required.

Employee to:

• Ensure that the assistance dog meets all standards for training, health and grooming at all times (as set by the relevant assistance dog association).

• Keep the assistance dog on a lead when walking around the University.

• Ensure that the dog wears a jacket, harness or tabard to indicate that it is working.

• Apply appropriate control, praise and discipline to the dog as required.

• Provide necessary equipment for the dog's wellbeing, for example a blanket or bed, water bowl and toys.

• Manage toilet breaks and water provision as required. (Although very unlikely, any accidents should be reported to an appropriate member of staff to ensure the area is cleaned and sanitised.)

Co-workers and colleagues to:

• Take instruction from the employee in relation to contact and approach to the assistance dog. Please note that it is inappropriate to stroke, feed or otherwise engage with an assistance dog unless the employee has given their permission.

• Address the employee (rather than the dog) and limit contact with, and distractions for, the assistance dog.

Further information:

• Assistance Dogs UK at http://www.assistancedogs.org.uk/
• RNIB at http://www.rnib.org.uk/?gclid=CP7VrdjawMwCFUqGwodPONYMvQ

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