



# University of Oxford Assistance Dog Policy for Students

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## Introduction

The University is committed to supporting disabled students and enabling them to get the best experience and benefit from their time at the University. The University works with disabled students whose disability-related needs require the support of an assistance dog with the aim of facilitating such requests wherever it is reasonable and appropriate to do so.

## Overview and definition

- 1.1 This policy sets out the University's policy on requests from students to bring assistance dogs into its premises and events, including but not limited to lecture theatres and other study spaces, libraries, department/faculty buildings and offices, and University accommodation. Unless a student's dog is recognised by the University as an assistance dog, the general rule is that it will not be permitted into University premises and events (there may be some exceptions: for example, the University Parks).
- 1.2 The University's definition of an assistance dog is:

*"A dog which is highly trained and required wholly or mainly for the purpose of assisting a disabled student in matters where they would otherwise face disability-related barriers or disadvantage."*
- 1.3 Under the [Equality Act 2010](#)<sup>1</sup> a person is considered disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a **substantial** (i.e., more than minor or trivial) and **long-term** (i.e., lasting or likely to last 12 months or more) adverse effect on their ability to carry out **normal daily activities**. 'Daily activities' include things people tend to do on a regular or daily basis, such as shopping, reading and writing, getting washed and dressed, preparing and eating food, walking or travelling, and taking part in social activities. They can also include study and education-related activities.
- 1.4 The standard of training required of an assistance dog is that it will behave in a manner which is not disruptive to other users of the premises and/or facilities and which will not cause damage to the premises and/or facilities.
- 1.5 In spaces used by other members of the University community and the public, including libraries, departments and faculties, this means that the dog will:
  - not wander freely around the premises,
  - sit or lie quietly on the floor next to their owner for extended periods of time, and
  - not foul in a public place.
- 1.6 In the absence of a clear statutory framework, this definition derives from the Equality and Human Rights Commission's definition of an assistance dog and the legal duties on the University set out in section 20 of the Equality Act 2010 and has regard to the statutory definition of an assistance dog set out in section 173 of the Equality Act 2010. It does not automatically include dogs which are described as, for example, therapy animals, or emotional support animals, whose purpose is not wholly or mainly for assisting a disabled student. It does include assistance dogs required by those with some types of mental health disability,

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<sup>1</sup> [Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

autism and some medical conditions, acknowledging the evolution of the law and social expectations in this area.

- 1.7 Responding to a request for an assistance dog is a two-stage process. Both stages have to be satisfied before an assistance dog will be permitted access. The first stage involves the University identifying a student's dog as an assistance dog and the student's specific requirements. In the second stage the departments or other premises which the student wishes to visit with their dog will carry out risk assessments to determine whether access is possible and whether any conditions of access need to be imposed. Access will not be possible in all places depending on the outcome of that risk assessment.
- 1.8 Colleges are separate legal entities and will have their own policies about access for assistance dogs. However, to ensure consistency in this area, the colleges and University have agreed that DAS will usually<sup>2</sup> handle Stage 1 for all requests for assistance dogs to have access to University and/or college premises.
- 1.9 Where appropriate, and allowed for by the relevant Privacy Policy, relevant information should be shared between parts of the collegiate university to avoid a student having to make a new application should they subsequently decide they want to access different premises.

## Stage 1

- 2.1 Students or offer-holders must submit a request to [disability@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:disability@admin.ox.ac.uk) if they need to bring their assistance dog into University and college buildings and premises as soon as possible and at least 12 weeks before access is required, except where the request is for access for an owner-trained dog in which case the request should be made at least 16 weeks before access is required<sup>3</sup>. This is due to the need to carry out an additional assessment in such cases as explained at paragraph 2.2(c) below.
- 2.2 The requests should include:
  - a) which University and/or college premises the student wishes their dog to access and any additional details that can be provided (e.g., which parts of the premises, likely duration of the access, etc).
  - b) evidence from a medical practitioner (e.g., a GP) of:
    - i. their disability
    - ii. if possible, their medical need for an assistance dog to assist in matters where they are disadvantaged by their disability in each setting(s) for which access has been requested, and
    - iii. if possible, information about how the assistance dog will help them with the matters in question.
  - c) If it has not been possible to provide this information from a medical practitioner under 2.2(b)(ii) and (iii), the student should explain:

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<sup>2</sup> Colleges retain the option of carrying out Stage 1 if the College considers that this is appropriate in particular circumstances.

<sup>3</sup> Where a student is offered a place on a course late in the admissions cycle, the University [and college] will endeavour to ensure that this process can be concluded before the start of the course where practically possible.

- i. their medical need for an assistance dog to assist in matters where they are disadvantaged by their disability in each setting(s) for which access has been requested, and
  - ii. information about how the assistance dog will help them with the matters in question.
- d) evidence of training their dog has received to meet the required standards of behaviour. Such evidence could include:
- i. Certification of training by an [ADUK/ADI](#) member organisation (automatically accepted);
  - ii. Certification of training by an ADUK Candidate organisation; or
  - iii. Any other evidence of professional training and, if relevant, assessment.

If no evidence of training can be supplied (e.g., because the dog is owner-trained), the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) can assist the student in arranging an independent assessment of whether a dog meets our required standards of behaviour.

2.3 The possible outcomes of Stage 1 are that DAS may conclude:

- a) The dog should be recognised as an assistance dog under the University's definition and may be granted the required access subject to the outcome of any risk assessments under Stage 2;
- b) The dog should be recognised as an assistance dog under the University's definition, but the evidence provided supports more limited access than requested by the student. For example, DAS could conclude that access is only required and/or appropriate in a student's accommodation, but not in their department (or vice versa); or
- c) The dog should not be recognised as an assistance dog under the University's definition.

## Stage 2

3.1 Stage 2 of the process is necessary because allowing a dog into University premises has the potential to have a significant impact on the University, e.g., due to the risk of disruption to other users, the risk of damage to University premises and collections and health and safety considerations.

3.2 If DAS identifies a dog as an assistance dog under the University's procedures under Stage 1, they will forward the relevant information to the relevant parts of the [collegiate] University, which may include the [college,<sup>4</sup>] department, faculty, Estates Services<sup>5</sup> or other premises where access is requested.

3.3 On receipt of suitable information as outlined above, the relevant local managers (including accommodation and admissions officers, where appropriate) will undertake a risk assessment to determine which parts of their premises the dog can enter and all the practical arrangements. Such consideration may involve consultation with the student and other users of the premises, and will take into account all relevant circumstances, which may include:

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<sup>4</sup> [This Procedure explains how Stage 2 is handled in relation to University premises. Colleges will have their own procedures for handling Stage 2 requests.]

<sup>5</sup> [Accessibility | Estates Services \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

- the disability-related needs of the student requesting access for their dog and which their dog assists them with;
- allergies or phobias of other users of the space;
- the likelihood of disruption to other users;
- scientific, academic or other regulatory requirements of a particular space (e.g., laboratories, kitchens or sterile environments where strict hygiene standards must be maintained);
- the value/rarity of University collections in the relevant space; and
- arrangements for the dog's essential care needs (e.g., in relation to access to water, a place to lie down and fouling<sup>6</sup>).

3.4 The local manager should then issue a Stage 2 outcome setting out either:

- a) that the outcome of the risk assessment is that access to the premises is not appropriate given the balance of risk; or
- b) that the outcome of the risk assessment is that permission for the dog to access some or all of the requested premises has been granted and the formal arrangements for that access. These may include, where appropriate:

3.4.1.1 which parts of the premises the dog can access;

3.4.1.2 any limitations around timing of access for the dog;

3.4.1.3 arrangements for fouling and feeding;

3.4.1.4 arrangements for notifying other users of the premises who may be impacted by the presence of the assistance dog.

## Student Responsibilities

4.1 Once permission has been granted for an assistance dog to access University premises, the continuation of that permission is contingent on the student continuing to meet their ongoing responsibilities which are:

- a) ensuring that the dog is micro-chipped and dog liability insurance is in place, and that any other legal requirements for dog owners are met;
- b) ensuring that the dog wears a jacket or harness to identify it as an assistance dog;
- c) ensuring that the dog meets the required behavioural standards at all time;
- d) that the dog's hygiene and welfare are appropriately maintained, including grooming, worming and flea treatment, and ensuring the dog is not left unattended for long periods;
- e) complying with any arrangements put in place by the department under Stage 2;
- f) complying with any local rules, or, in the case of accommodation, the terms of any tenancy or occupation agreement;

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<sup>6</sup> Estates Services can assist with the process of identifying/creating 'spending areas' for University premises where necessary, but in some instances the student will be able (and expected) to handle this independently, e.g., by walking the animal off-site.

- g) complying with any legislative quarantine requirements or rules of the UK Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) if bringing an animal into the United Kingdom<sup>7</sup>.

4.2 Student owners of assistance dogs are responsible for any nuisance or damage to property or other users of University premises caused by the dog<sup>8</sup>.

## Outside spaces

5.1 If a student's dog is recognised as an assistance dog under Stage 1 of the procedure, which is that it is considered appropriately trained to access spaces used by other members of the University community and the public, the student will be issued by DAS with a card identifying their dog as such. This will automatically give them access to outdoor University [and college] space where dogs are not otherwise allowed entry, without a risk assessment being required (for example, the Botanic Gardens and Harcourt Arboretum).

## Complaints

6.1 Complaints by students about the application of this policy:

- 6.1.1 If a student has a complaint about a University decision under this policy, they should follow the usual [Student Complaints Procedure](#). Complaints should be raised as soon as possible and at any event within 3 months of the matters complained about. The first stage of the Complaints Procedure is to raise the matter with the relevant University department. If the complaint relates to a decision under Stage 1, this is likely to be DAS, while if the complaint relates to a decision under Stage 2, this is likely to be the department where access for your the dog was requested.

6.2 Complaints by other users of premises about an assistance dog:

- 6.2.1 Other users are asked to remember that assistance dogs are working animals and are not pets. We would ask everyone to be mindful of this and in particular:

- talk to the student, not the dog;
- not feed, pet or distract the dog;
- not try to separate an assistance dog from its owner.

6.2.2 Other users should also be aware that certain assistance dogs, for example seizure alert dogs, are trained to behave differently when they detect a potential seizure and they can appear to be misbehaving for a short period of time.

6.2.3 Where, having first considered the above guidance, another user of University premises has a complaint about an assistance dog on University premises they should follow the procedure set out in the Appendix to this policy. If they have a complaint about an assistance dog on college premises they should follow the appropriate college complaint procedure.

6.2.4 Complaints which are upheld and confirm findings of bad behaviour and/or damage to property and/or breach of the arrangements authorised under Stage 2 of this Policy may result in a number of outcomes, including withdrawal of the dog's

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/bring-pet-to-great-britain> and <https://www.theukrules.co.uk/rules/immigration/arriving/pets-travel-scheme/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> See 6.2 and Appendix 2.

recognition by the University as an assistance dog and/or consequent withdrawal of permission for the assistance dog's permission to access certain University or college premises.

6.3 Any member of the University who mistreats an assistance dog could be subject to disciplinary action.

## Requests for regular access for student family members

7.1 This paragraph applies where a request is made for a student's partner's and/or other family member's dog to access University [and/or college] premises as an assistance dog because they are living in University [and/or college] accommodation with the student. This procedure will apply in such cases except that the Stage 1 process will be carried out by the relevant local manager who will be able to seek advice from DAS as appropriate.

## Other animals

8.1 As explained above, access to University [and college] premises require an assistance animal to be trained in order to protect other users and University property.

8.2 However, the University recognises that there may be exceptional circumstances in which a student requires disability-related support from an animal which is not a dog, including animals which cannot be 'trained', particularly in their accommodation. Such students will need to provide, in addition to the medical evidence listed in Stage 1 above, evidence of training, as set out above for assistance dogs, or, in the alternative, evidence explaining how the risks to other users of the premises and to University property can be properly mitigated.

8.3 Where an animal other than a dog is granted access under this policy, the references to a "dog" in this policy should be read as including references to that animal.

## Useful links and resources

The Equality Act 2010: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

EHRC guidance: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/assistance-dogs-a-guide-for-all-businesses.pdf>

## Document control information

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# Appendix 1

## Summary of Process for Requesting an Assistance Dog

The following is a summary of the procedure for requesting access to University premises for a student's assistance dog. It should be read in conjunction with the Assistance Dogs Policy which sets out the detail of the procedure.

### Stage 1

1. Student or offer-holder submits a request to [disability@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:disability@admin.ox.ac.uk) as soon as possible but at the latest 12 weeks before access is required (or 16 weeks for owner-trained dogs), including details of:
  - which University and/or college premises their dog needs to access
  - evidence from a medical practitioner and other supporting information
  - evidence of training their dog has received (if there has been no training, DAS will discuss alternative options)
2. A Stage 1 outcome is issued to the student setting out whether the dog has been identified as an assistance dog under the University's definition and whether the evidence supports the access requested or more limited access, subject to Stage 2.

### Stage 2

3. DAS sends relevant information to the relevant college(s), department(s), faculties and/or other premises where access is requested (may also include Estates and Accommodation Services).
4. Relevant local managers undertake a risk assessment to determine which parts of their premises the dog can enter and all the practical arrangements.
5. A Stage 2 outcome is issued to the student confirming whether access has been granted and, if it has, formal arrangements for access.



## Appendix 2

### Complaints

1. This procedure is intended to deal with complaints about assistance dogs that have been granted access to University<sup>9</sup> premises. If another user of University premises wishes to raise a complaint about an assistance dog, they should follow the below procedure.
2. This procedure will not be applicable where the allegations relate to the behaviour of the student-owner of the assistance dog, rather than the assistance dog itself. Complaints about student conduct, such as unruly behaviour on University premises, or harassment, should be raised using the applicable [procedure](#).
3. Complaints about assistance dogs should be made to the head of department responsible for the premises in question.
4. Complaints must be made within 1 month of an alleged incident. They will not be considered if they are raised outside of this period.
5. Complaints must include:
  - a) A description of the assistance dog, to allow its identification; and
  - b) A description of the alleged incident, including the precise location and the date and time it occurred.
6. On receipt of a complaint the head of department, or their delegate, will conduct an initial assessment. This may include meeting with the complainant to better understand their concerns.

### Informal resolution

7. In the majority of cases, the head of department, or their delegate, will seek to resolve complaints about assistance dogs informally.
8. Where a complaint has been raised by a regular user of University premises, the head of department will seek to resolve the complaint by ensuring that both the complainant and owner of the assistance dog user can continue to make reasonable use of the University premises without causing either party significant concerns. This might include engaging with the complainant and the owner of the assistance dog, or arranging for the parties to engage in a mediated discussion. It might also include suggesting additional voluntary measures to facilitate the equitable shared use of the space.

### Formal consideration

9. If the head of department (or their delegate) considers that: (a) further to their initial assessment, the complaint is too serious to resolve informally; or (b) informal resolution has not been successful, they will investigate to establish the relevant factual evidence and decide on any actions that should be taken.

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<sup>9</sup> Complaints about assistance dogs on college premises should be made to the relevant college

10. The University reserves the right to exclude an assistance dog from its premises on a temporary basis, pending the conclusion of this process if the head of department considers that the dog poses a threat to the health and safety of other people.
11. The investigation process may include holding separate meetings with the complainant, the owner of the assistance dog and any other witnesses. Those attending investigation meetings will have the right to be accompanied by a student, a member of University or College staff, or a member of staff from Oxford Student Union's Student Advice Service.
12. Every effort will be made to achieve a prompt outcome and both parties will be kept informed.
13. At the conclusion of the process the head of department, or their delegate, will determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint. Both the complainant and the owner of the assistance dog will be advised of this outcome.
14. If a complaint is upheld, the head of department, or their delegate, may:
  - a) issue a formal warning to the owner of the assistance dog in respect of its behaviour. This warning will be considered in the event that future complaints about the dog's behaviour are upheld; or
  - b) refer the matter back to DAS under Stage 1 of the Policy to consider whether the dog continues to meet the required standards of behaviour. This may result in the dog losing its status as an assistance dog, or its access to University premises may be limited; or
  - c) implement a re-assessment of the dog under Stage 2 of the Policy. A reassessment may result in a decision that:
    - i. access to the premises (potentially including accommodation) is no longer appropriate given the balance of risk; or
    - ii. permission for the dog to access the premises is maintained but is subject to further restrictions or additional arrangements including: which parts of the premises the dog can access; any limitations around timing of access for the dog, and/or imposing new arrangements for fouling and/or feeding.
15. If, following the conclusion of this process, the complainant, or user of the assistance dog has a complaint about the way in which their complaint was handled, it should be raised using the applicable procedure, which may be the [Student Complaints Procedure](#) or [Staff Grievance Procedure](#).