

Assistance Dogs at u3a Activities

Assistance dogs are support aids for people with disabilities. Guide dogs for blind people are the best known example but there are many others.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) document 'Assistance dogs: A guide for all businesses'^(*) says:

Assistance dogs are not pets and are treated as 'auxiliary aids'.

We must therefore accept assistance dogs at all u3a activities unless there are compelling reasons otherwise.

Difficulties and Exceptions

The EHRC document says:

Assistance dogs are highly trained which means they:

- *will not wander freely around the premises*
- *will sit or lie quietly on the floor next to their owner*
- *are unlikely to foul in a public place*

The requirement to admit them should not cause difficulties in most circumstances where groups meet outdoors or in public buildings, provided all parties, including the dog owners, are prepared to make reasonable adjustments. For example, an assistance dog at the Table Tennis group would have to be kept well away from the play area to avoid risk of someone tripping over it. This is just one example. Rather than attempt to prescribe solutions for all possible problems, anyone planning to bring an assistance dog to a group meeting is asked to contact the group coordinator in advance and discuss what special arrangements, if any, might be needed.

Where a group meets in a private house, it is up to the householder whether they are prepared to admit a dog. If they are not and an assistance dog user wishes to join the group, those involved should seek a mutually acceptable compromise which might include moving to different premises.

(*) The EHRC document is available at:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/assistance-dogs-guide-all-businesses>.

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