



SC07 Assistance Dogs and Emotional Support Animals Policy

Version Date: June 2025

Review Date: July 2027

1. Purpose

North East Scotland College is committed to providing a safe and supportive learning and working environment for all of its students, staff, contractors and visitors. The College recognises that some students will need to bring in an assistance dog wholly or mainly for the purpose of assisting that person to carry out day to day activities and will therefore require access to the College's premises and its relevant buildings. In exceptional circumstances and when there is clear medical evidence consideration will be given to requests by students to bring emotional support animals to the College.

This policy draws upon guidance given within the Equality Act 2010, our Public Sector Equality Duty in Scotland and advice from the Equality and Human Rights Commission to inform how or if we can make reasonable adjustments to best meet student needs.

2. Scope

The purpose of this Policy is to set out guidance to provide clarity for students and staff of the College with regard to bringing assistance dogs and emotional support animals on College premises.

3. Definitions, Processes and Guidelines

3.1 Assistance Dogs

An assistance dog can support disabled people (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) by carrying out a variety of practical tasks as well as supporting their independence and confidence. Assistance dogs are also trained to help people with hearing difficulties, epilepsy, diabetes, physical mobility problems and more.

Assistance Dogs are highly trained and some may wear a distinct harness or jacket.

Assistance Dogs are permitted to accompany their owners at all times and in all places (UK) unless there is a genuine health and safety risk.

3.1.1 Processes

Students who wish to bring an Assistance Dog to College must:

- Meet with the Student Advice and Support Team in order to complete a Needs Assessment which would also include a risk assessment
- Complete the College's Assistance Dog and Emotional Support Animal application form and conduct agreement

3.1.2 Guidelines

Owners must comply with the following guidelines when Assistance Dogs are on College premises:

Information

As part of the Needs Assessment process, owners are requested to discuss the nature of the support provided by the assistance dog to inform the assessment of any reasonable adjustments.

Insurance

Public Liability Insurance for the dog should be held by the owner. As part of the risk assessment, owners must accept full responsibility for their assistance dog and its behaviour.

Access restrictions

Owners of assistance dogs must respect access restrictions established by the College on grounds of health and safety. This information would be included in the risk assessment as mentioned in section 3.1.1.

Animal misbehaviour

Owners must ensure that their assistance dog does not cause harm or injury to others and damage to College property. Preventing and correcting misbehaviour of the assistance dog is the owner's responsibility.

Cleanliness

Owners must take responsibility for the clean-up of their assistance dog's waste and shall use reasonable endeavours to use the designated toileting areas identified by the College. Registered blind people are not required to clean up after their assistance dog but they are expected to have received the appropriate training to avoid dog waste on campus.

Animal Care and Supervision

Owners are fully responsible for their assistance dog care and they must ensure that all requirements of the assistance dog in relation to feeding, watering and toileting are fully met. Owners must also ensure that the animal is kept on a lead or harness at all times when on College premises.

Animal Training

Owners are responsible for any additional training needs of their assistance dog and for correct and safe performance of their duties.

Animal Health

Owners must evidence that their assistance dog has an up-to-date vaccination record and is in good health.

Advice and Guidance

Assistance dogs are working animals and advice will be provided to staff and students as required.

3.2 Emotional Support Animal

Emotional support animals are considered those that provide emotional support to help alleviate identified symptoms or effects of disability. This type of animal is different to assistance dogs and will only be permitted on College premises in exceptional circumstances and will be assessed on a case by case basis. Consideration will be given as to whether the adjustment of bringing such animal onto College premises is reasonable or if the student can be supported effectively through other services.

3.2.1 Processes

Students who wish to bring emotional support animals to College must:

- Meet with the Student Support and Advice Team in order to complete a Needs Assessment which would also include a risk assessment
- Complete the College's Assistance Dog and Emotional Animal application form and conduct agreement

The decision on the request will be made by the Assistant Principal. If the student is unhappy with the decision a review of the decision can be requested in writing to the Vice Principal, Curriculum and Quality. If the student is still unhappy following a review they will be entitled to follow the complaints procedure.

3.3 Pets

A pet is considered a domesticated animal and is not considered to be an assistance dog or emotional support animal. The College does not permit to bring or keep pets on College property.

4. Conflict Situations

Students are responsible for the behaviour of their assistance dog or emotional support animal and the College reserves the right to exclude an animal from the College premises and/or facilities.

4.1 Threat and Behavioural Issues

The College reserves the right to remove or bar entry to an assistance dog or emotional support animal when it poses a direct threat to the health and safety of others. Animal misbehaviours may also provide grounds for removal, after all reasonable measures have been taken.

4.2 Damage

Assistance dog owners are responsible for any damage to persons or College property.

4.3 Restricted access

The College may restrict access of assistance dogs or emotional support animals to certain areas for health and safety reasons. Any applications of exceptions will be considered on a case by case basis.

4.4 Conflicting disabilities

Where an assistance dog or emotional support animal poses adverse health risk to an/other student/s or staff, the College will require medical evidence from the affected party/ies to determine suitable alternative arrangements for either or both parties.

4.5 Religious or cultural conflicts

Religious and cultural beliefs cannot be used to deny/prohibit access to assistance dogs or emotional support animals and their owners.

Status:	Approved	Summary of changes Updates to job titles, addition of the requirement to evidence vaccination record and health of animal(s) and to reflect updated information and advice from Equality and Human Rights Commission.
Approved by:	Executive Team	
Date of version:	June 2025	
Reviewed by DPO:	26/10/20	
Responsibility for Policy:	Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality	
Responsibility for Review:	Head of Student Support and Engagement	
Review date:	July 2027	
EIA date:	09/08/2022	

DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT (DPIA)

1. Does the activity that this policy or procedure relates to use personal data in any way? (Use may refer to collecting and gathering; storing electronically; storing by paper; sharing with other parties (internal or external to college); use of images as well as written information; retaining and archiving; or erasing, deleting and destroying)	Yes
2. Does the activity that this policy or procedure relates to use special category personal data in any way? (Special category data is data about: race; ethnic origin; politics; religion; trade union membership; genetics; biometrics (where used for ID purposes); health; sex life; or sexual orientation)	Yes
3. Does the activity that this policy or procedure relates to involve the use of social media or a third-party system?	No

If the answer is 'yes' to one or more of the above questions, the Data Protection Officer must be consulted.

Date of DPO consultation:	Oct 2020
Description of outcome and actions required (if any): The assistance dog application form should only contain questions that are necessary for the purpose of managing assistance dogs onto campus, that data is kept to a minimum and that the data is only used for assistance dogs related purposes. A full DPIA will be completed if the DPIA screening document indicates that it is required.	
DPIA screening/full DPIA required:	Yes
DPIA screening completed but a full DPIA is not required.	

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Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Form

Part 1. Background Information. (Please enter relevant information as specified.)

Title of Policy or Procedure. Details of Relevant Practice:	Assistance Dog and Emotional Support Animals Policy
Person(s) Responsible.	Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality
Date of Assessment:	June 2025
What are the aims of the policy, procedure or practice being considered?	The aim of this policy is to provide a clear, lawful and inclusive framework for the presence of assistance animals and emotional support animals on NESCol premises. It sets out the circumstances under which animals may be permitted on campus, recognising the College's duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students, staff, and visitors.
Who will this policy, procedure or practice impact upon?	College Staff, Students and Visitors

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Part 2. Public Sector Equality Duty comparison (Consider the proposed action against each element of the PSED and describe potential impact, which may be positive, neutral or negative. Provide details of evidence.)

Need	Evidence
Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.	Evidence includes records from student Needs Assessments, which capture input from students, staff, and relevant professionals regarding the use of assistance dogs and emotional support animals. These assessments reflect a collaborative, person-centred process and ensure individual needs are appropriately identified and responded to. Supporting documentation, such as the Assistance Animal Application Form, Conduct Agreement, and individual Risk Assessments, provides a structured basis for fair and consistent decision-making. These tools help the College ensure that any support offered is proportionate, lawful, and in line with duties under the Equality Act 2010. This evidence base supports transparent decision-making, helps to avoid indirect discrimination, and ensures that animal access is managed in a way that is inclusive, safe, and legally robust.
Impact: The policy ensures that assistance dog access is implemented in line with the Equality Act 2010, reducing the risk of unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation. It provides clear guidance for staff and students, outlining the distinct treatment of assistance dogs and emotional support animals and ensuring all requests are considered fairly and consistently. By using a pre-planned, student-centred process involving curriculum teams and external professionals where needed, the policy supports the appropriate placement of students and ensures reasonable adjustments are identified and monitored. This approach benefits students who may experience barriers related to disability, long-term health conditions, neurodivergence or trauma, and affirms NESCol's wider commitment to equality across all protected characteristics.	

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Need	Evidence
Advancing Equality of Opportunity	Evidence includes student outcome data, which may highlight attainment gaps for disabled students or those experiencing poor mental health, including learners who benefit from assistance or emotional support animals as part of their support plan. Documentation from the Needs Assessment process further supports the identification of individual support requirements and ensures that adjustments are appropriately tailored and monitored. This enables equitable access to learning and wider college life.
Impact: The policy ensures a consistent and lawful approach to considering requests for assistance and emotional support animals, helping to remove participation barriers for disabled students and others with support needs. By embedding this into the Needs Assessment process, and through proactive collaboration between the Student Advice and Support Team (SAST) and curriculum staff, students receive tailored support that facilitates access to learning, progression and achievement. This promotes equality of opportunity by ensuring disabled learners are not disadvantaged in accessing or succeeding in their course due to inflexible or unclear policies. The approach is designed to be inclusive across all campuses and supports the College's commitment to equity, accessibility and trauma-informed practice.	

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Need	Evidence
Promoting Good relations	Evidence includes student feedback, staff feedback and engagement data gathered through the Needs Assessment process and wider support services. This feedback highlights the importance of clear and inclusive communication when assistance animals or emotional support animals are present on campus. Student outcomes data and informal reports also show that when there is misunderstanding or lack of clarity about the purpose of an assistance dog or ESA, this can lead to discomfort, stigma or peer conflict. By contrast, consistent procedures and awareness-raising activities help to promote understanding among the wider student body and reduce potential for prejudice or exclusion.
Impact: The policy supports good relations by promoting open dialogue, reducing stigma, and helping staff and students understand the role and legitimacy of assistance dogs and emotional support animals in supporting disabled individuals. Clear procedures reduce the risk of misunderstanding, prejudice, or resentment and help create a culture of respect and empathy across the College. By involving curriculum teams, support services, and where appropriate, peers, the policy encourages partnership working and builds shared understanding of difference. Students who require this support feel acknowledged and respected, while others benefit from a clear framework that explains why and how animal access is managed fairly and safely.	

Part 3. Identifying Impact on Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	Age	Disability	Gender Reassignment	Marriage/Civil Partnership	Pregnancy and maternity	Race	Religion or belief	Sex	Sexual Orientation
Impact Identified: - Positive (P) - Negative (N)	N/I	P	N/I	N/I	N/I	N/I	N/I	N/I	N/I

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- Neutral Impact (N/I)									
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Part 4. Action & Outcome (Following initial assessment, describe any action that will be taken to address impact detected)

- Continue to monitor the number and nature of applications for assistance dogs and emotional support animals to ensure any emerging patterns of positive or negative impact on protected groups are identified promptly.
- Maintain and regularly review the fair, transparent assessment process to ensure it remains legally compliant and inclusive, especially for non-ADUK trained assistance dogs.
- Provide training and guidance for staff on the distinctions between assistance dogs and emotional support animals, and on managing requests in line with Equality Act 2010 obligations.
- Regularly review communication materials for students and staff explaining the policy, application process, and rights to reasonable adjustments, promoting awareness and reducing potential misunderstanding or stigma.
- Gather feedback periodically from applicants, support teams, and curriculum staff to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy and identify any areas for improvement.
- Review the policy every 2 years or sooner if legislation changes or if significant issues arise, ensuring it remains up to date with best practice and statutory requirements.

Outcome:

These actions will help ensure the policy continues to support equality of opportunity and fosters an inclusive, respectful environment for all students and staff, particularly those with disabilities or mental health needs. They will minimise risks of unlawful discrimination or indirect barriers related to assistance animal access, while promoting a positive and safe campus community.

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Sign-off, authorisation and publishing *	
Name:	Gwen Watt
Position:	Head of Student Support and Engagement
Date of original EIA	March 2023
Date EIA last reviewed	June 2025

**Please note that an electronic sign-off is sufficient*