

Dogs for Welfare

(Pet) Dogs on University Premises

Rationale:

Having pets in the workplace and in universities is becoming increasingly common and has shown a number of benefits to both staff and students, dog owners and non-dog owners alike. These benefits include reduced stress, fewer sick days, greater productivity, more social interaction and more physical activity (for example [click here](#)). Students perceive university staff with a dog in their office to be friendlier and the environment to be more comfortable than an office without an animal¹. In both the UK and Canada, it is increasingly common practice to have 'puppy rooms' available or visitation dogs to alleviate stress and anxiety around transitions (starting and ending university) and exam time^{2,3}. Our own stage 1 students listed their pets as the thing they missed most from home when asked in their induction.

With the increased pressure of university life – on both sides of the staff/student divide – can universities capitalise on the benefits that private companies have seen by allowing dogs in the workplace environment? Can this deliver a tangible benefit in staff and student wellbeing? Purina has allowed dogs in its London office for 14 years. The office is entirely open plan over three floors with 1,000 staff who all hot desk. They have proactively solved issues with allergies, phobias and worries about how the dogs will behave and have set up the Pets At Work Alliance to support other organisations to find a solution to their unique workplace issues ([click here](#) for some of their work).

We are beginning the conversation here at Newcastle University, to canvas views specifically about allowing pet dogs in the workplace (this is not about other types of pet, or children, or other caring responsibilities people may have). There are a set of draft rules (below) that are proposed as the starting foundations for any scheme, to ensure that those who do not like dogs or who suffer from allergies would not be disadvantaged or made to feel uncomfortable in the workplace.

Draft rules

Guiding principles:

1) Welfare of the dogs

- a) Dogs are not left alone in offices (very short periods excepted)
- b) Dogs should be appropriately introduced and habituated to the office environment via a 3-month trial period to determine whether the dog is happy to settle in the work environment and after that period issued with a 'PAWSport' to allow it to come to work. The dog must attend work at least 8 times during the pawbationary period.
- c) The dog should have a comfortable and appropriate space to rest (e.g. a bed or crate) with access to water and regular outdoor breaks
- d) Dogs should be signed in & out so their presence on the premises is known (e.g. in the event of fire and for those who wish to avoid dogs). Dogs will have a prearranged and agreed buddy, so if something unexpected happens and the owner needs to leave their office for a longer period, that dog's buddy can check on them regularly (note: the owner still has overall responsibility for the dog; see section 3 below).

- e) Dogs should be over 10 months of age to have the physical and mental maturity to cope with the workplace environment
- f) The dog's welfare and comfort interacting with different people in different environments is paramount. Busy city centre and office environments are full of objects, noises and people that dogs would not typically encounter in their day to day life at home and it is important that their need to gradually adapt to these factors is taken into account. This means a slow and gradual introduction to the environment, respecting the dog's need to rest by limiting visiting times and having a space it can go where it knows it will not be disturbed. It is also important to pay close attention to the dog's willingness to engage in any given interaction and allow the dog the choice not to approach someone or something that makes it feel uncomfortable.
- g) In the case that dogs are involved in a scheme where others can take them for a walk, the dog should not be exercised more than appropriate for their level of physical fitness, body condition and size/breed. This will vary by dog and advice may be sought on a case by case basis to develop this recommendation for a given dog. Note: the dog's owner remains responsible for any consequences resulting from their dog's behaviour even if they are not the one walking them at the time.

2) Safety and welfare of staff and students

- a) The dog can pass an assessment of their behaviour in the workplace environment, including appropriate response to owner, absence of reactivity to a range of people and noises, toilet-training and ability to settle in the workplace (see Appendix 1).
 - i) This assessment is repeated every 2 years.
- b) The owner can demonstrate they have appropriate public liability insurance for the dog, covering injury to others, and insurers are informed that the dog attends the workplace
- c) The dog has an annual veterinary check and annual vaccinations and evidence of this is submitted to the university for those in the scheme
- d) Dogs are treated for fleas and worms regularly
- e) Dogs are kept on a short, non-extendable lead in communal areas where dogs are allowed (corridors, stairwells, lobbies etc.)
- f) Dog beds and baskets should not represent a trip hazard
- g) There should be designated dog-free areas (such as specific lifts or stairwells, communal areas such as food preparation areas, and meeting rooms) and dog-free routes into and out of the building for those who wish to avoid dogs.
- h) People with a dog should have a sign on their door when the dog is in their office
- i) In the case of shared office space, dogs should not be allowed to have their habitual resting place within a 5m radius of a staff member with an allergy

3) Responsibility for the scheme and the individual dog

- a) The scheme will be overseen by a 'Dogs for Wellbeing' champion, who is responsible for ensuring appropriate checks have taken place, evidence of public liability insurance and annual vaccinations have been submitted, and that participants are adhering to the spirit of the scheme (i.e. that the welfare of the dogs is paramount, owners are adhering to entrance restrictions, and movement restrictions within the department)
- b) **Employees are responsible for their dog at all times whilst on University premises.** Even if a colleague, who is not the dog's owner, is temporarily looking after a dog, dog sitting or walking a dog that has clearance to be on the premises, the employee will be held responsible for any

incidents, accidents, injury or damage caused to either University property, other University employees or students, or other dogs

- c) Employees are liable for the actions of their dog. Employees are asked to provide evidence that they have an insurance policy that provides adequate cover for damage to third party property or injury to third parties (including fellow employees and their dogs). Owners must agree to cover any cost(s) associated with damage to third party property or injury to third parties (including fellow employees and their dogs)
 - d) The University holds public liability insurance that provides coverage in the event that there is an accident or damage to property of third parties or injuries to third parties arising as a result of some negligent act on the part of the University. However, as the dog on the premises is not the University's property, the employee is at all times responsible for his/her dog and liable to defend any claim resulting from their dog causing damage and/or harm to property or another person.
 - e) Owners should not leave their dog in the care of anyone else, unless this has been prearranged and all parties have checked in advance that they have adequate availability. It should not be incumbent upon any member of staff to look after someone else's dog if they have not previously agreed to do so.
 - f) Individuals bringing their dogs into work who breach any of these rules shall, in the first instance, be subject to a 'fair warning' where the breach is highlighted and subsequent adherence is monitored. If they breach the rules a second time, then access to the scheme will be revoked and they will not be permitted to continue to bring their dog into the workplace.
- 4) Fairness and equity
- a) There will be a pilot phase where there will be limited access to the scheme. This is to ascertain the safety and practicality of having a dog on the premises. Key evaluation criteria for the pilot will be whether owners are abiding by the requirements of the scheme, impact on wellbeing, disruption, and any negative impact (e.g. allergies, dog anxiety).
 - b) During the pilot:
 - i) Only one dog will be allowed at any time
 - ii) The dog must stay in a single-occupancy office
 - iii) The owner should have a clear diary on the day the dog attends the workplace
 - c) Following the evaluation of the pilot, a decision will be made about whether to continue with the scheme and whether to expand it. It is not anticipated that job role or working in a multi-user versus single-occupancy office would form part of the criteria to access the scheme.

Appendix 1: Components of the Behavioural Assessment

This assessment has been used to select a dog's suitability to be a teaching dog on veterinary programmes.

Stage 1: Owners complete a questionnaire about subtle signs of fear, aggression, resource guarding, or discomfort and excitability.

Stage 2: Observations of the behaviour reactions of the dog (by Dr Lucy Asher) when approached by a stranger, when in an enclosed area, to a loud noise, to a physical examination (looking at ears, teeth, eyes, tail, tummy). This would really explore if the dog is at all uncomfortable by a variety of

interactions with a person or has any sensitivities to touch.

References:

¹ Wells & Perrine 2001 *Anthrozoos* 14(3):161-168 <https://doi.org/10.2752/089279301786999472>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/07/puppy-room-canadian-university>

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-38094913/the-therapy-dogs-that-help-stressed-students>