



**Excellence in
Dog Training,
Behaviour &
Welfare
2021-2025**



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Executive Summary

This paper provides an overview of the requirements that should be met in respect of ensuring the welfare of guide dogs. It covers explanations of the high-level principles that are used to inform design of services and operational practice in the care and training of our dogs and has drawn upon legislation from various countries, within and outside of the EU, guidelines from the International Guide Dog Federation, Assistance Dogs International and the development of international standards.

It provides the strategic direction on how to develop Guide Dogs further into a best-in-class provider of assistance dog services, where the welfare of our dogs is recognised as important to us as the wellbeing of the people we serve. The two are intrinsically linked and experience a mutual inter-dependency – this is represented through our commitment to the principle of partnership.



What is animal welfare?

Animal Welfare is a complex and evolving concept, and the term can mean different things to different people. Whilst we all agree that dog welfare is important, the term is ill-defined and even experts have very different views as to what 'good' welfare is and how we can achieve it.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has produced some useful guidance and a definition:

- Animal welfare means the physical and mental state of an animal in relation to the conditions in which it lives and dies.
- There is a critical relationship between animal health & animal welfare.

- Animal welfare assessments should consider what an animal needs and what an animal wants – i.e., the apparent strength of preferences & aversions.

Perspectives on animal welfare are influenced by 'values', 'science' and are often specific to the 'culture' of different nations or indeed organisations. However, this simple definition may cover most elements:

Animal welfare is about ensuring the wellbeing of an individual animal from the animal's point of view. It includes animal health and encompasses both the physical and psychological state of the animal.

In 2017 the canine assisted service development plan, recognising the changing societal expectations, stated the need to create and embed our dog assisted services within an ethical framework which moved the organisation from a utilitarian approach towards our dogs (describing them by their function, and stressing their value to a customer rather than their intrinsic value as a dog). The development plan 2017 stated:

“We want to get to a stage that the relationship between our dogs and our people (all our handlers but especially our customers who should have the longest and deepest relationship of all) is as good as it can be for both parties. Our aspiration, for our dogs, is that we provide them with opportunities to thrive both as individuals and within their role. If we get this right, we can best assure that our dogs have a good quality of life, whilst also supporting our customer's needs and our supporter's expectations.”

In 2023 we are significantly further forward in delivering the goals we set ourselves. Our two systemic change projects, Standardised Training for Excellent Partnerships (STEP) and Puppy Raising for Excellent Partnerships (PREP) are well advanced but far from embedded in operational delivery. The content explains modern, science-based approaches to dog training and behaviour; animal agency and places an increased emphasis on our handlers (volunteers, service users and staff) building a human-dog relationship based on trust; treating every interaction with our dogs as a conversation – where our people are asked to listen to and importantly respond to what the dog is 'telling' them. This direction of travel is very much representative of the best of the professional dog sector and where Guide Dogs must position itself. However, as people learn more about animal ethics, increase their recognition of the sentience of animals and how this relates to the human-dog relationship, they may become challenged by ensuring that we meet the needs of our service users whilst at the same time ensuring the welfare and wellbeing of our dogs. This strategy is intended to help with this thinking.



Lifetime Welfare

The starting point in developing this strategy is a recognition that dogs are sentient beings who can perceive their environment and experience sensations such as pain, fear and discomfort or pleasure, happiness or enjoyment and can give expression to these sensations.

In terms of definitions, welfare and wellbeing are often used as synonyms; however, are distinct from each other. Whilst welfare is defined as the physical and mental state of an animal in relation to the conditions in which it lives and dies, wellbeing is defined as the animal's subjective internal state in response to its physical and psychological perception and interpretation of internal and external stimuli. The treatment that an animal receives is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry and humane treatment. By ensuring our dogs achieve a good state of health and welfare they are most likely also to have a good sense of wellbeing – but individual dogs will perceive their situation differently and thus may experience a different sense of wellbeing, even when in the same situation as others. Of course, determining 'wellbeing' is in itself subjective as it is impossible to know for certain how any other living being is feeling about their situation.

Lifetime welfare encompasses the whole life course of the dog from pre-birth to old age and death. Accommodating the welfare of the dog is a legal requirement but fundamental to the ethical basis of being a responsible guardian. As a guide dog experiences multiple changes of caregiver in its lifetime, the same core principles and practice must apply equally to all the individuals responsible for the care of the dog, either temporarily or permanently. We can limit any negative consequences of change, as dictated by the nature of our business, by good management of the dog's environment, ensuring that dogs build secure bonds with people as soon as possible and then have standardised processes that ensure that unnecessary and unpredictable change is reduced to an absolute minimum. PREP and STEP deliver this objective within a simple framework that can be applied across a whole life course. The following sections summarise the high-level principles upon which we build operational practices to achieve dog welfare and wellbeing.

One Welfare

One Welfare is an international concept that serves to highlight the interconnections between animal welfare, human wellbeing, and our shared physical and social environment.

One Welfare extends the approach of the One Health theme used for human and animal health and promotes the direct and indirect links of animal welfare, human wellbeing and environmentally friendly animal-keeping systems. Given the role of assistance dogs and the impact that they have on people's physical and psychological health and thus the ability to lead full lives, One Welfare presents an interesting and useful framework for Guide Dogs, based as it is on encouraging an interdisciplinary approach to human, animal and social welfare – and our commitment to environmental sustainability.



The Five Domains Model of animal welfare

In defining, advising about, and assessing welfare, current legislation in the EU relies heavily on the Five Freedoms, namely freedom from: hunger and thirst; discomfort; pain injury and disease; fear and distress and the freedom to express normal behaviour.

However, ‘freedom from’ a negative state is increasingly considered to be a limiting factor when considering overall wellbeing of our dogs. The Five Freedoms recognise animal sentience but do not in themselves ensure that the dog has a life worth living; the Five Freedoms allow a dog to survive but not necessarily thrive. At Guide Dogs we believe that welfare must be seen from the animals’ perspective – their own perception of their physiological and psychological state. Good wellbeing depends upon the dog experiencing positive emotions, not just avoiding negative states. For example, it is better to provide the dog with a choice of comfortable places to rest, not just a basic means to avoid actual discomfort. We want our dogs to find the act of eating food pleasurable and enriching, not just a means to avoid hunger or maintain physical body condition and health.

The Five Domains Model, (fig. 1), was originally intended to enable prospective and retrospective assessment and grading negative impacts of research, teaching, and testing procedures on sentient animals. The five domains were: (1) nutrition, (2) environment, (3) health, (4) behaviour and (5) mental state.

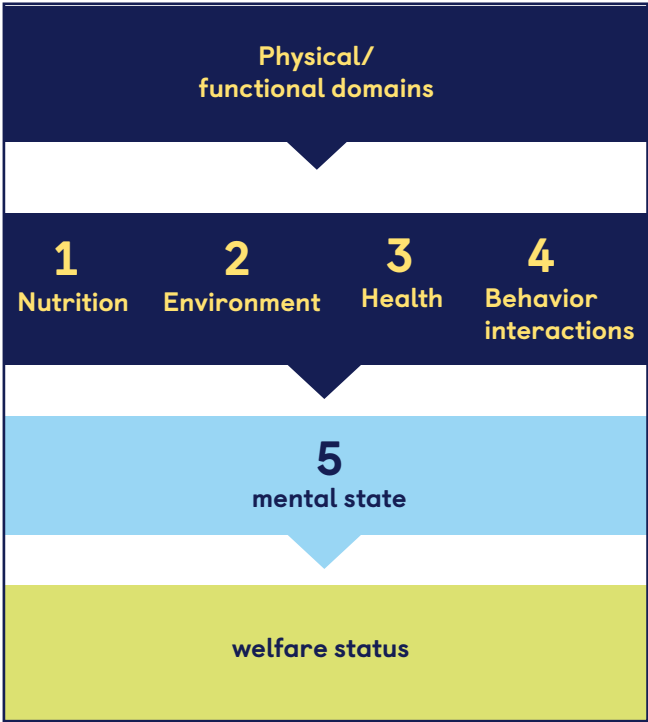


Figure 1, The Five Domains Model

However, assessment of welfare remained primarily focused on the avoidance of negative affects within each domain. From the early 2000’s increasing attention was placed on positive affective experiences and shifted away from mere physical care of animals towards their psychological wellbeing. This also marked the time when the model expanded beyond the laboratory setting and started to be applied to agriculture, captive animals and working animals amongst others. This model has recently (2020) been further updated to include, within the structure of the model, specific guidance on how to evaluate

the negative and/or positive impact of human behaviour on animal welfare. Domain 5 has been adjusted to include the impact of human interactions on the welfare of animals and recognises that the presence and behaviour of people can be primary causes of animals’ behavioural and affective responses. This update is of relevance to Guide Dogs and enhances the utility of this model in operational practice. At Guide Dogs, we embrace this framework as a means of ensuring that our dogs, in all roles and at all ages, have a Good Life (Appendix 1).

The Least Intrusive and Minimally Aversive (LIMA) Principle

Progressive dog trainers and organisations such as Guide Dogs support the use of the LIMA principle when approaching behaviour modification and training. The same principle should be used in all interactions with our dogs, such as health treatments.

LIMA requires that practitioners use “the least intrusive, minimally aversive technique likely to succeed in achieving a (behaviour change) objective with minimal risk of producing side effects”. It is also used as a competence criterion, requiring practitioners to be adequately taught to apply the LIMA principle in their interactions with dogs. Whilst not expressly preventing use of punishment in training or behaviour modification, the use of positive reinforcement techniques is emphasised as being the most humane, and certainly the primary intervention to achieve an effective outcome. The LIMA principle also stresses the importance of providing the learner with as much choice and control as possible, with due consideration to meeting their individual or species typical needs.

Guide Dogs withdrew the use of ‘half check collars’ for dogs in training in 2018, this equipment being, as the name implies, used to ‘check’ (correct/positively punish) undesirable behaviours. At the same time the Ethical Training Policy was updated to emphasise the need to avoid use of positive punishment whenever possible – indeed expressly stating that physical punishment is no longer considered appropriate in the training of behaviours. Dogs qualifying today are proactively taught behaviours that we do want (which are then positively reinforced) rather than ‘corrected’ for behaviours that we don’t want. We manage the dog’s environment to help avoid undesirable behaviours and do all that we can to set them up for success.

Our social license to operate

Guide Dogs, as with most assistance dog organisations throughout the world, rely on the generosity and support of the public to fund and deliver our work. Without funding and volunteers, we simply would not be able to provide our services to the people who benefit from them.

We need to be constantly aware of how society at large may be changing and whether these changes may affect how we are viewed. There are many animal-related industries that are being challenged on their animal welfare credentials and thus their social license to operate. The public may not be able to articulate either the Five Freedoms/Domains or the LIMA principle, but they are certainly increasingly educated and cognisant about animal welfare and recognise when something 'just doesn't feel right or fair'.

However, we are here to serve people with sight loss, and we passionately believe that dogs offer huge benefits to people and certainly help our service users to live actively, independently, and well. In any relationship, there are expectations on 'the other', and sometimes these expectations can conflict. When this occurs, both parties may need to compromise to achieve an outcome that is appropriate, if not always ideal, for either party. When dogs are in partnership with a person with sight loss, our staff are required to support the development of the partnership in ways that work for both person and dog. Sometimes, the dog may be in a less than optimal situation because an intervention such as withdrawing the dog from partnership would place the person in an even worse position (e.g., not being able to travel independently and therefore provide for their basic needs).

Management of partnerships to achieve an appropriate outcome for both person and dog needs a pragmatic but empathetic approach, where there are advocates for both parties round the table. Placing or leaving a dog in a compromised welfare position presents significant risk to our reputation. Withdrawing a dog from a vulnerable person does likewise. These cases are always complex and difficult, given the need to consider to what degree welfare and wellbeing is being compromised to either party. This complexity highlights how practical and ethical dilemmas can arise when attempting to deliver our charitable purpose, maintain our dog's wellbeing and protect our reputation. Decisions are made much easier by having robust processes in place and ensuring that we, as an organisation, can offer an alternative service to dog-assistance. Total dependency upon a guide dog is not desirable, and service users should be enabled (indeed actively encouraged) to obtain and maintain alternative mobility skills and a social/support network of other people.

The Five Domains and the LIMA principle are now the bedrock of our teaching of our staff. This means that our practices are at the higher end of the spectrum of welfare – and we should therefore not be surprised when our staff, in applying their new knowledge, question the morality of some of our traditional practices and when they attempt to 'listen' to their dogs decide that not every dog 'wants' to be in the role we have selected for them. It is also true

that some of our traditional practices, whilst effective, are no longer acceptable to us and changes of this nature can be difficult for some people to accept.

However, if we get this right, we can robustly defend the very many benefits of an assistance dog programme, not just for the people but the dogs too. Our dogs are bred well, with low incidents of painful and/or life limiting health conditions. They are raised and socialised in a nurturing environment, which means that they are more likely to be included in family life and less likely to experience a lifetime of fear and anxiety through poor socialisation. This is as important for our dogs that do not enter partnership as those that do. Training and care are based upon positive

reinforcement, humane methods, provision of choice, behaviour management and cognitive enrichment through learning. Our dogs are partnered with people who are taught how to build strong and reciprocal relationships with their dogs, based upon mutual trust and respect. Our dogs get to accompany their human partner on their daily travels and activities, meet other people and dogs and rarely get left alone for significant periods (a very common welfare issue for 'pet' dogs). They get plenty of opportunity 'to be a dog' and to retire at a time when 'work' (a human concept) is no longer the best option for them, either physically or psychologically. They then have a secure retirement in a loving home. We should be proud about this!



Ethos – dog behaviour monitoring system

To breed and provide the most suitable dogs, accurate measures of temperament and behaviour are required. Previously, Guide Dogs did not separate temperament and behaviour data, and our previous 'Canine Assessment Summary' (CAS) data system became unfit for purpose.

Ethos has become the replacement system, delivering an updated system of behaviour monitoring that supports the rollout of PREP and STEP, ensuring a more holistic approach to behaviour measurement that can be used to improve decisions made in our breeding programme and inform the Born to Guide (genomics) project. The benefits of an updated system include reduced bias, removal of unhelpful dog labels, providing data useful for breeding, ability to monitor training progress, identifying areas for improvement, earlier prediction for outcome and withdrawal, resource savings and a measure for comparing behaviour across a standardised system. Importantly, using a series of scientifically validated questionnaires makes it possible, for the first time, for volunteers to make a meaningful contribution to the data we then use to make short and longer-term decisions. Ultimately, Ethos will be able to inform decisions at an individual or population level, and so improve welfare and long-term breeding decisions, and in the creation of genomic breeding values.



A holistic approach to achieving dog wellbeing

To achieve optimal dog wellbeing (as a reminder this is defined as the animal's subjective internal state in response to its physical and psychological perception and interpretation of internal and external stimuli), it is essential to identify and align all activities that interact together with the environment to produce a state of physical, psychological, and emotional wellness.

The Five Domains model explains the factors that should be considered but stresses that behaviour and health must be considered together and not separately before deciding how best to manage a dog to achieve optimal wellbeing and to achieve desired outcomes. With separate teams responsible for health/welfare and training/behaviour it is necessary to align managers and staff to a shared objective with respect on both sides for professional expertise. The impact of physical health conditions and pain upon behaviour is becoming much more recognised and is an intrinsic part of the learning for our staff through PREP and STEP. Unfortunately, some health conditions can be subtle in their presentation and difficult to clinically diagnose. There is a need for clear protocols around when dog trainers should work collaboratively with dog health and veterinary professionals to overcome a behavioural or task training issue.

Co-operative care is an important illustration of our different specialist staff working together to achieve dog welfare and wellbeing. Co-operative care involves teaching the dog several behaviours that provide them with agency, control, and the ability to actively participate in their own care. Done well, these behaviours make it less necessary to restrain a dog for treatment purposes and results in lower stress for both dog and person during this interaction. These same behaviours may

then be taught to service users who continue to practice these behaviours with their dogs, meaning that the dogs may receive better care from their human partner. Co-operative care is a beneficial life skill for our dogs and is introduced via PREP and developed in STEP. It is also useful for our breeding dogs who need to be taught the skills they need to be fully content in their role, which may involve veterinary procedures which some could find aversive.

However, the concept of cooperative care must be pragmatically balanced with the reality of veterinary practice and the ability of volunteers and service users to teach/maintain/prove such advanced behaviours – and recognise the nuances of provision of choice. There are times when it is necessary to complete a health care or veterinary procedure as and when this is required – the dog has little 'choice' in the matter. Sensible and pragmatic discussions between handlers and veterinary staff must take place to ensure an appropriate health investigation or treatment plan is completed.

Cooperative care is a relatively new principle, gaining traction in the world of dog behaviour but not universally accepted by all parties. However, Guide Dogs remains well placed to play a leadership role in educating veterinary practices on the benefits of adopting a low stress, fear free or cooperative care strategy.

Dog Health & Welfare Service

Our service model must deliver a quality Dog Health and Welfare service for our dogs and customers, at an affordable and sustainable cost to the charity. Guide Dogs has a duty to provide excellent care to a population of over 8000 dogs. Providing quality and appropriate dog care is the foundation of all interventions.

This responsibility begins before the pups are born and extends into retirement and ultimately end of life. We know that if a guide dog is not healthy then the customer will be impacted, and the partnership placed at risk. We also have a duty to support the volunteers who look after our dogs and puppies, and the service users who become their partners, so that they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to give the dogs the best care possible. Our donors are very often 'dog lovers' and will not tolerate any perception of lower than optimal dog care practices.

Our Dog Health and Wellbeing system operate through use of a network of first opinion veterinary practices, external veterinary experts, and internal expertise. Professor Gary England is contracted as our Chief Veterinary Consultant (CVC) and chairs a committee of regionally based Centre Veterinary Advisors (CVA). We also work with a defined number of referral clinics and specialists in conditions such as dermatology, ophthalmology, orthopaedics, and clinical veterinary behaviour.

In addition to managing clinical cases these external veterinary experts guide and advise on operational practice, breeding practice and horizon scan to ensure that our health protocols are current, and evidence based. Our external veterinary experts advise our internal specialists that include national, regional, and community-based staff, many but not all of whom are veterinary nurse qualified, and who ensure that service users and volunteers and of course the dogs that they care for are supported in the most appropriate way.

2021 marked a change for Guide Dogs in the appointment of a Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) who joined the Operations Leadership team to ensure that the national dog care and wellbeing service is delivered efficiently, effectively, and ethically.

2023 sees the appointment, for the first time, of a team of in-house veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses. We have also invested in two veterinary clinics – one at the Reading Hub and the other at the National Centre. Guide Dogs now has a better balance of internal and external veterinary expertise to deliver optimal care of our dogs.

This investment in veterinary talent aligns to Guide Dogs commitment to strengthening strategic leadership and strong professional/technical expertise in canine services by establishing roles of a CVO, a Chief Science Officer, a Head of Canine Genetics, and a Director of Canine Affairs. We also created an Animal Welfare and Ethics Panel, chaired by the Director of Canine Affairs which reports to the trustees. This panel will provide ethical reviews of new or updated operating practices and provide expert advice to the executive.

These senior roles and ways of working will together ensure that our strategic direction is based on evidence and science and that Guide Dogs has a stronger voice as a world leader in breeding, training and welfare of dogs and the human-animal relationship.



Our Centres

Significant effort has been put into ensuring that the design brief for our new centres will create the infrastructure to deliver ideal opportunities for providing education and enrichment activities for our dogs. These same facilities will be available for the early stages of partnership training and puppy classes.

Indoor dog accommodation is intended to provide an area for dogs to rest and relax. In these modern spaces, dogs may participate in activities such as grooming, massage, co-operative care behaviours and enrichment delivered by dog health and wellbeing staff and specialist volunteers.

Other dog facilities are intended to provide a range of indoor and outdoor spaces for education and enrichment. In these spaces dogs and handlers will access a variety of themed zones to target desired outcomes such as:

- Mind Zones: for training activities such as developing task behaviours and non-guiding behaviours.
- Body Zones: for fitness and conditioning activities such as low-level agility courses, proprioception exercises and confidence building.
- Spirit Zones: for sensory enrichment, sand pits, water play, social play, and one to one play sessions.

Shared, multi-functional spaces will bring our trainers, volunteers, staff, service users, and dogs together as one Guide Dogs family with a shared ambition to enable people with sight loss to live actively, independently, and well. We are building for the next two decades and it's worth the investment of time and funds to get this right.



Education and knowledge sharing

Education in this instance is to be understood in its broadest sense.

It encompasses education in formal and academic settings as well as providing knowledge and training relating to dog care and dog welfare in less formal ways to our staff, volunteers & service users. It involves raising cultural consciousness about the importance of dog welfare and wellbeing.

Different skills are needed to deal with individual dogs during their lifetime. People involved in breeding and rearing puppies need different skills & knowledge to those involved in training and these are different again to those involved in husbandry. However, the dog's whole life experience is important to ensure that the dogs are equipped for life, and especially can cope better with and recover from any unexpected adverse events.

With the transition to many more of our dogs being cared for through a volunteer fosterer/ day care model (which means a dramatic uplift in the numbers of volunteers in a dog related role) it is critical that dog guardians/carers/ handlers understand and acknowledge that they bear primary responsibility for ensuring the welfare of the dogs under their care. Guide Dogs responsibility is to ensure that these people are provided with the necessary knowledge and skills. PREP, STEP & Ethos are key enablers for dissemination of knowledge to our stakeholders and for the standardisation of the way that we do things at Guide Dogs. Our staff are key to transferring knowledge and skills to volunteers and service users – and changing some traditional practices that are no longer fit for our purpose.

Our PREP/STEP framework

We adopt a simple model that helps frame our interactions with our dogs to gain the best outcomes for both dogs and their people – volunteers, staff, and clients:

1. Knowing each other.

We need to understand dogs as a species, get to know our dog as an individual; understand the stages of puppy development and how these stages impact on behaviour; and understand that health (especially pain) & behaviour are intrinsically linked.

2. Managing for success.

Management of environments, situations, and the dogs themselves is important to keep everyone safe. Careful, thoughtful, and consistent management helps prevent undesirable behaviours and supports development of desirable behaviours that will become habits over time. However, there are times when life is not perfect, and it may be necessary to interrupt an undesirable behaviour in the moment. When this is necessary, we aim to this in a neutral (without emotion) fashion and this intervention should be intended to be instructive rather than corrective.

3. Training together.

We base how we raise and train our dogs upon ethical principles especially using positive reinforcement reward based methods to teach and establish desired behaviours. Positive reinforcement (PRT) is accepted as the most ethical way to teach behaviours, produces the best outcomes in terms of learning and creates a strong human-dog relationship. We want our dogs to be happy and healthy dogs but also confident and capable in their role as guide dogs. We do not use physical punishment or techniques which cause fear or stress to modify behaviour. Such methods do not meet

our ethical standards and are increasingly unacceptable to the public. In the event when an undesirable or dangerous behaviour needs to be stopped, we may verbally interrupt an inappropriate behaviour and then redirect the dog towards a more appropriate one which can then be reinforced. We recognise that dogs and people train together, learn from, and adapt to each other's needs.

4. Being a partnership.

We are here to help people with sight loss to live actively, independently, and well. We treat our dogs as our partners and co-workers and seek to balance the needs of people against the needs of our dogs when making decisions. However, no one (humans or dogs) has full autonomy and choice in their daily lives – and all of us may sometimes be required to do things that we may not enjoy. Wherever possible, we seek to work with our dogs and teach them through PRT to choose to engage with these activities. If that is not possible, we continue to apply our ethical principles and ensure that overall, our dogs enjoy a good quality of life.

This framework applies to all our dogs throughout their life journey, regardless of their role. The four elements – knowing, managing, training, and partnering – are concepts that can be applied by all our volunteers, staff and ultimately our clients and rehoming. This means that all our handlers 'speak the same language' and apply the same thought process in their interactions with their dogs. This approach provides the dog with predictability and consistency, ultimately producing strong human-dog partnerships based upon a shared understanding of meeting each other's needs.

Conclusion

Guide Dogs should be proud of the way in which we embrace ensuring high welfare standards for dogs. However, the global 'welfare bar' is being raised and appropriately Guide Dogs has risen to the challenge, developing a 5-year strategy in 2017 that was intended to position the organisation at the forefront of dog training, behaviour, and welfare. Of course, the global pandemic interrupted our progress to achieve all elements of the plan within this timeframe, so we now need to mobilise our managers and staff to make up for some lost time.

Going forward, we aim to increasingly demonstrate our leadership and expertise in:

- Creating and nurturing strong relationships between people and dogs
- Ethical breeding, puppy socialisation and dog training
- Championing the welfare and wellbeing of dogs in everything we do



However, this strategy can stand or fall on a failure to adequately look after our dogs. It is beholden on all of us to ensure that we are ever mindful of our responsibility to safeguard our dogs' welfare and wellbeing, and thus our organisations' reputation.

Appendix 1: The Five Domains Model

The Table below has three columns and five rows

Provision	Animal Welfare Aim	Application at Guide Dogs
1. Good nutrition: provide ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.	Minimise thirst and hunger and enable eating to be a pleasurable experience.	Provision of good quality diets, appropriate to life stages and provided free of charge. Use of food to provide enrichment, encourage species typical behaviour and reinforce desirable behaviours.
2. Good Environment: provide shade/shelter or suitable housing, good air quality and comfortable resting areas.	Minimise discomfort and exposure and promote thermal, physical and other comforts.	Defined dog to space ratio that matches DEFRA guidelines. Provision of comfortable bed spaces. Provision of comfort in offices and vehicles. Transition to foster first care model for dogs in training. Policies on safe working practices in extreme weather.
3. Good Health: prevent or rapidly diagnose and treat disease and injury, and foster good muscle tone, posture, and cardiorespiratory function.	Minimise breathlessness, nausea, pain and other aversive experiences and promote the pleasures of robustness, vigour, strength and well-coordinated physical activity.	Excellent breeding programme producing low prevalence of congenital health conditions. Excellent veterinary care provided free of charge. Immediate access to quality professional advice and guidance.

Provision	Animal Welfare Aim	Application at Guide Dogs
4. Behavioural Interactions: provide for expression of agency, sufficient space, proper facilities, congenial company, and appropriately varied conditions.	Minimise threats and unpleasant restriction on behaviour and promote choice and engagement in rewarding activities.	Careful selection of volunteers and defined eligibility for service that includes providing for dog wellbeing. Commitment to positive reinforcement training. Use of the humane hierarchy & LIMA principle. Teaching cooperative care and low stress husbandry skills to all dogs and handlers. Teaching of volunteers, staff and service users in dog-centred approaches, recognition of the dog's preferences and then how to meet their needs.
5. Positive mental state: provide safe, congenial and species (breed/age) appropriate opportunities to have pleasurable experiences.	Promote various forms of comfort, pleasure, interest, confidence, and a sense of control.	Building enrichment activities into every day. Retirement is based upon a holistic assessment of the dog and their lifestyle rather than solely chronological age. Providing sufficient rest and recreation and 'time to be a dog'.

Appendix 2: The Dog Journey – supporting welfare at every stage

The Breeding Programme

Our breeding programme involves the planned breeding of dogs that are physically and temperamentally capable for working as a guide dog. The breeding programme is responsible for the selection of suitable breeding animals, the care and wellbeing of breeding dogs (studs and broods), the selection of appropriate pairings of studs and broods to produce healthy puppies with appropriate temperaments for their intended role, the breeding process itself, the whelping, care, and socialisation of puppies for the first 8 weeks and finally the preparation of puppies for their transition to their volunteer puppy raiser families. Guide Dogs support natural mating whenever possible, however collection, storage, and use of semen for artificial insemination, especially with other breeding programmes, is essential to ensure genetic diversity, overall health status of the guide dog population and insure against catastrophic loss of genetic material.

The Puppy Development Programme

What a puppy learns in its first 12 months has a direct impact on the likelihood of it going on to be a successful guide dog, and regardless of their future, we have a duty of care to every dog we breed. During this early period, the puppy raiser nurtures the pup's physical and emotional development so that they enter formal training with the best possible chance of meeting the specific needs of customers. Our commitment to reward-based training means that our dogs need to experience the same approach at all stages of their life. We want to support our puppy raisers to move away from the concept of 'training' the puppy and towards a concept of 'teaching skills for life' that will set the young dog up for a confident transition to working life. The PREP project was launched to our volunteers in July 2021 and will fundamentally alter how our 3,700 volunteer puppy raisers will be asked to interact with their puppy based around our four principles: Knowing your Puppy; Managing for Success; Teaching Foundations; Being a Partnership. PREP re-designs the content of how our pups are developed to reflect the greater than ever emphasis on reward-based training and embraces technology as an additional method to support our volunteers.

The Training Programme

By harnessing the power of positive reinforcement, we are continuing to change how we train, care for, and manage our dogs, resulting in a better learning experience for our dogs and ultimately a better quality of service for guide dog owners. STEP was launched in the business in 2018, having developed and tested a standardised training pathway for our dogs and a standard way for staff, volunteers and guide dog owners to handle and train the dogs using positive reinforcement at the foundation of every interaction. We are progressing delivery of this major change programme through investment in our people. We have recruited Training and Behaviour Advisors and Training and Behaviour Consultants – reaching out to the best and most progressive of our staff whilst also attracting new talent from academia, assistance dog and working dog sectors. We are using these skilled people to educate all 230 colleagues and associated volunteers involved in the training of guide dogs and creation of guide dog partnerships. A further 360 staff who support other elements of our work with our dogs will receive foundation training in the principles, techniques and power of positive reinforcement and all Guide Dogs staff complete an eLearning module so that everyone across the organisation is engaged with the new principles and understands why we are making these changes. Through this process we will upskill around a hundred Guide Dog Trainers to acquire the same skillset as their Guide Dog Mobility Specialist colleagues in the training of dogs. This change offers greater flexibility for our managers to deploy their staff.

Partnerships

Partnering a dog with a service user and then supporting that partnership for life is the core element of our canine assisted activities. Our service users must also receive support in adapting to changes to operational practice so that they too develop the skills necessary to get the best out of their partnership with their dog. As with our staff and our volunteers, adapting to this ‘new’ welfare orientated landscape is not always easy for our service users, given that many of them have been taught traditional and conventional handling techniques, sometimes for decades. Explaining the responsibilities of dog ownership, and especially the high welfare ethos of Guide Dogs, to service users at each stage of the customer journey will ensure that only people who have the required potential to be a full partner to their dog are accepted for a canine assisted service, meaning that the risk of compromised welfare to dog, and the emotional, functional and (for Guide Dogs) financial impact of a ‘failed’ partnership is avoided. Finding ways that enable service users to develop skills and knowledge pre-and post ‘class’ is essential and offers much scope for peer-peer learning and group-based activities (with all the benefits of social networking).

Retirement

Retirement of a working guide dog is an example of when an inter-disciplinary approach is required; one that considers the person and dog as the partnership they are. It is necessary to consider physical, psychological, and emotional elements and what demands are being asked of the dog. It is especially necessary to consider the welfare advantages and disadvantages of retirement from the dog’s point of view; without being influenced by anthropomorphic attitudes towards the human concept of retirement. A dog’s welfare needs may best be met by a graduated reduction in work and exercise demands over an extended timeframe, assuming they are cognitively and physically able to perform what is asked and remains a willing partner in guiding activities. Alternatively, retirement of a dog at a set age (e.g., ten years of age) may force a separation of an established and mutually beneficial relationship (if the client cannot keep the retired dog) or worse, a service user needing to choose between a commitment to their present dog or the benefits of re-partnering with a successor. Clearly, maximum longevity of every partnership has a financial benefit to the charity and a functional/social benefit to the service user.

Retirement may place the dog into a situation where they have a reduced quality of life due to a reduction in exercise, stimulation and even increased social isolation if the owner re-trains with a successor. Recent DNA research in the genomes of Labrador retrievers concluded that the pattern of aging in dogs, relative to humans, follows a logarithmic law that challenges the traditional view of 1 dog year being equivalent to 7 human years. Using this logarithmic law, a 10-year-old Labrador would be 68 in human years; an 11-year-old 69 and a 12-year-old 71. The only valid justification for fixing a ‘standard’ retirement age is one of reputation and the public perception of a clearly elderly dog still working.

Adoption and Rehoming

Guide Dogs finds alternative pet homes for approximately 900 dogs per year of all life stages, including those requiring end of life care. Our ambition to deliver up to 1,000 new guide dog partnerships per year will result in a corresponding increase in the number of dogs for rehoming (assuming success rates remain unchanged). People seeking a dog from Guide Dogs often have assumed that our dogs will be ‘easier’ than one sourced from another rehoming organisation. As we investigate more options to use our dogs to support people with sight loss, the dogs being available for adoption may have more complex health and behavioural needs. It is essential for us to consider how we best meet the needs of those dogs who no longer have a role within the guide dog service or the wider organisation; we still have a moral obligation to them, and they too deserve our best efforts to provide them with a good life.

Appendix 3: Useful references

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGWW): <https://apgaw.org/>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/animal-welfare>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/animal-welfare-legislation-protecting-pets#animal-welfare-act-2006>

Useful links Scotland and Northern Ireland:

<https://www.animallaw.info/article/legal-protection-animals-uk>

<https://www.animallaw.info/statute/scotland-animal-welfare-animal-health-and-welfare-scotland-act-2006>

<https://www.animallaw.info/statute/northern-ireland-animal-welfare-welfare-animals-act-northern-ireland-2011>

The Animal Welfare Act (2006): <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/contents>. Introduced by DEFRA to combat animal abuse and came into force in 2007. It makes any individual responsible for an animal to perform a duty of care by meeting its basic needs. Guide Dogs has a duty to ensure that both the Organisation and anyone acting on our behalf (e.g., customers, volunteers or staff) adhere to this legislation. When reviewing Guide Dog practices and policies these guidelines must be taken into consideration to ensure best practice. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/697953/pb13333-cop-dogs-091204.pdf

The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018

Under the Animal Welfare Act certain activities are required to be licenced. Schedule 1 of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 ("the regulations") defines the licensable activities for each sector.

A "licensable activity" means one of five activities involving animals: selling animals as pets, providing for or arranging for the provision of boarding for cats or dogs (includes boarding in kennels or catteries, home boarding for dogs and day care for dogs), hiring out horses, dog breeding and keeping or training animals for exhibition. In all cases except dog breeding, licensable activity is restricted to businesses or those operating on a commercial basis defined as:

(a) makes any sale by, or otherwise carries on, the activity with a view to making a profit, or

(b) earns any commission or fee from the activity.

For the breeding of dogs, the definition in Schedule 1 requires licencing if either or both of the following apply

(a) breeding three or more litters of puppies in any 12-month period or

(b) breeding dogs and advertising a business of selling dogs.

However, the activity of breeding only assistance dogs or dogs intended to be used as assistance dogs within the meaning of section 173 of the Equality Act 2010(3) is exempt from licencing requirements.

Due to Guide Dogs charitable status and the fact we only breed dogs intended for assistance dogs we are exempt from licencing, however when considering any diversity within our activities it is essential to consider any potential impact on how these changes may affect or status. Although exempt from licencing the government guidance notes demonstrate good practice and Guide Dogs should always strive to demonstrate the higher level or have evidence-based research that fully justifies why this may not be appropriate.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/762432/animal-welfare-licensing-providing-day-care-for-dogs-guidance.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/762431/animal-welfare-licensing-providing-boarding-for-dogs-guidance.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/880217/dog-breeding-guidance.pdf

The welfare of our dogs (guidance for staff, volunteers and service users): <https://guidedogs.sharepoint.com/sites/knowledge/Knowledge%20Documents/Forms/Published%20Documents>.



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