# Food premises: Your legal obligations

## Introduction

There are approximately two million people in the UK with sight loss and this is increasing. The information below relates to the legal obligations surrounding the access rights of people with sight loss, including guide dog owners.

If a person who is vision impaired feels they have been discriminated against they may decide to take legal action.  As a service provider, failure to comply with your legal obligations to make “reasonable adjustments”, may result in you or your business facing prosecution.

The information in this document relating to access for people with guide dogs can also apply to other disabled people with assistance dogs.

## What the law says

Disabled people including guide dog owners and other people living with sight loss, have important rights under the Equality Act 2010, or Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 (Northern Ireland).

This means people with sight loss have the same right to services, supplied by restaurants, cafes and other food outlets, as everyone else. As a service provider, you are required to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people can access your service.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) state: “There is nothing in food safety or food hygiene legislation preventing customers taking assistance animals, working animals or pets, into the front-of-house areas of food retailers or catering establishments.” For further advice contact your local environmental health office.

Cultural beliefs can raise sensitive issues relating to dogs. However, religious grounds cannot be used to exclude guide dog and assistance dog owners. The Equality and Human Rights Commission successfully reached agreement on this with numerous religious groups.

The law surrounding access for disabled people is “anticipatory”. As a service provider you should consider the needs of disabled people, including guide or other assistance dog owners, and make any necessary reasonable adjustments prior to those customers accessing your service.

## Examples of reasonable adjustments

“Reasonable adjustments” is a phrase used within law to give flexibility and allow different solutions in different situations. When considering reasonable adjustments, it is recommended to ask individual guide dog owners and other people with sight loss what assistance they require.

* Amend any “no dogs” policy to allow access for guide and other assistance dogs. Guide Dogs can provide window stickers saying your business welcomes guide and other assistance dogs.
* If requested, guide the customer with sight loss to their table or to the bar. Follow this link to the Guide Dogs website for information on sighted guiding: [Sighted guide training](https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/how-you-can-help/sighted-guide-training/)
* Guide dog owners should be offered the same choice of seating as other customers. Ask the guide dog owner where they would prefer to sit, with sufficient room for the guide dog to lie under the table or next to its owner, as it has been trained to do.
* Offer to read the menu and let the customer know if the menu is available in other formats such as digitally, in large print or Braille.
* In self-service restaurants, staff could offer to assist the guide dog owner in choosing food and carrying meals to a table.
* Offer to assist the guide dog owner in paying the bill.

## What you need to know

Guide dogs are working animals, not pets. They are trained to provide independence and mobility to their owners. Guide dog owners are trained to maintain a high grooming standard of their dog, with attention to cleanliness. All guide dogs receive regular veterinary checks to ensure they are healthy, fit and able for work.

Guide dogs do not disrupt the everyday operation of businesses. They are trained to refrain from disturbing other people or climb on furniture and remain under the control of their handler.

## Open Doors campaign

Guide Dogs ‘Open Doors’ campaign aims to end access refusals faced by people with guide dogs. We want to educate businesses and empower guide dog owners to put an end to this form of discrimination. You can find out more on the Guide Dogs website by following the link to: [**Guide Dogs current campaigns Open Doors**](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/opendoors)

## Further information

Visit our Useful Resources document.

If you require any further information, please email **Information@guidedogs.org.uk** or call 0800 781 1444.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission have issued helpful information for businesses regarding welcoming assistance dog owners. Please follow this link to: [**‘Assistance Dogs; A Guide for all Businesses’**](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/assistance-dogs-guide-all-businesses)

The information given in this document was correct as of May 2024. This document provides basic information and is not a substitute for legal advice.

## End of document