

Scottish Natural Heritage

# Creating positive opportunities to engage with commercial dog walkers

Guidance for Access and National Park Authorities in Scotland



Scottish Natural Heritage  
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

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# Introduction

There can be many benefits of commercial dog walking, for both the dog owner and walker as well as for the local environment. However, in response to a growing perception of problems arising from irresponsible access by commercial dog walkers, Scottish Natural Heritage ran six workshops in 2013 to investigate opportunities for working with this group of users.

A full report can be found in “Commercial Dog Walkers in the Outdoors: Attitudes, engagement and opportunities”<sup>1</sup>. However, in brief, the aims were to increase awareness of the “Scottish Outdoor Access Code (Access Code)”<sup>2</sup> and aspects of safe, responsible dog walking. Dog owner behaviour is most influenced by other dog walkers<sup>3</sup> so the workshops also provided the opportunity to research whether commercial dog walkers could become advocates for responsible dog walking with their peers.

This guidance has been put together using the experience of running the workshops and the event evaluation questionnaires and aims to help others by:

- Raising awareness of commercial dog walking business practices and providing insight into what their clients require.
- Highlighting the potential for displacing unwanted behaviours to other sites or areas.
- Suggesting ways to add value to responsible dog walking businesses.
- Developing their role as advocates and ambassadors for responsible access with other dog walkers.



# Impacts of commercial dog walking

People who walk other people's dogs for payment can have positive and negative impacts on society in general and on the local environments in which they operate. Many of these impacts are similar to those for private individuals walking multiple dogs and can be seen in the table below.



| Positive aspects   | Negative aspects   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Allows people out at work all day or with mobility impairments to enjoy the health and social benefits of dog ownership<sup>4</sup>. Others who can benefit include people with temporary ill health, and also those requiring 'emergency' care for other occasional one-off walks.</li><li>▪ Regular visitors to dog walking areas are able to promptly report problems such as vandalism, pollution, fires, fly-tipping and antisocial behaviour.</li><li>▪ Provides flexible, often home-based employment, sometimes combined with other dog-related activities such as grooming, training and day care.</li><li>▪ Reduces noise, damage or other nuisance for owners and neighbours caused by under-exercised dogs.</li><li>▪ Reduces the need for dogs to be euthanised, re-homed or to live in welfare-compromised circumstances if owner cannot give sufficient exercise.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Greater impacts arise from non-compliance with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code – e.g. fouling of land – due to cumulative effects of multiple visits and numbers of dogs being walked.</li><li>▪ Multiple dogs exiting vehicles at the same time not always under control.</li><li>▪ Income generation can encourage irresponsible access-taking, such as walking more dogs than can be reliably controlled off-lead.</li><li>▪ Can appear an easy way to make money by people with no long-term commitment to professionalism, animal welfare or sustainable management of the areas visited.</li><li>▪ Large numbers of dogs in one place can be intimidating to other people with or without dogs.</li><li>▪ Exercising dogs belonging to different owners, especially at the same time, can make them harder to control.</li><li>▪ Fly-posting of adverts in popular dog walking car parks and along paths.</li><li>▪ Generally unregulated industry.</li></ul> |

It is important to recognise and support the positive impacts of dog walking when trying to reduce negative impacts. This will increase effectiveness, reduce cost, make for more constructive engagement with dog walkers and potentially present more attractive projects for funding applications.

The additional opportunity with commercial dog walkers, compared to people walking their own dogs, is their motivation to become advocates for responsible access, because they perceive there is a commercial advantage to the businesses from doing so.

# Managing for commercial dog walkers

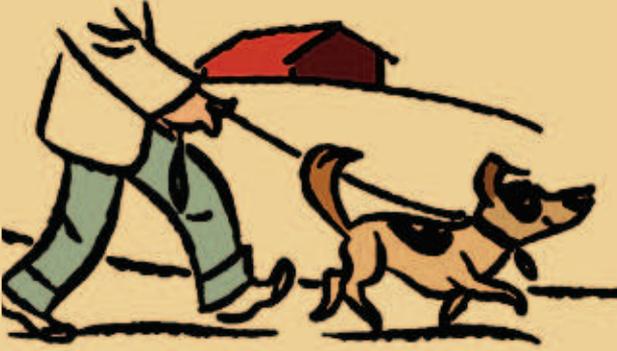
The following table shows information gathered from the pre- and post-event workshop questionnaires and how it can be applied to access management.



CDW = commercial dog walkers.

| Questionnaire findings  | Implications for access management  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Average dog walk duration is 58 minutes (this can be equated approximately with a typical non-commercial circular dog walk<sup>5</sup> of 2.7km).</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access management is unlikely to constrain CDW into small areas of greenspace; it is more likely to displace activity to a different location.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>96% of CDW drive dogs to walk areas.</li> <li>average drive to dog walk area is 19 minutes.</li> <li>maximum drive time to dog walk area is 26 minutes.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CDW are flexible in where they go. It makes sense to take advantage of this and try to find areas of less conflict if possible, rather than inadvertently causing displacement by restrictions.</li> <li>Car park location, management and charging can influence walk location. Tickets or permits can provide opportunities to influence behaviour.</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Average time spent as a commercial dog walker is 3 years.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement and education with CDW must be frequent enough to work with a 3-year cycle of new businesses starting up and turnover of staff.</li> </ul>  |
| <p>Number of dogs walked at one time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>minimum 2 dogs.</li> <li>maximum 10 dogs.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wide range in number of dogs walked at one time.</li> <li>CDW do not always walk large numbers of dogs.</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>75% of CDW clients want dogs exercised off-lead.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Areas for safe, conflict-free off-lead access will be valued and sought.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>88% of CDW walk dogs themselves rather than employing others.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Typically small, owner-operated businesses allowing direct contact by access authorities to the people actually walking the dogs.</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most popular places for commercial dog walking are woodland, parks, hillsides and moorland.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While parks in urban areas are popular, more extensive landscapes are highly valued, and are also where conflict can occur with wildlife or livestock.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>38% of CDW feel there are fewer places to walk dogs than 10 years ago.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conflict in areas attractive to CDW could be increasing due to intensification of use rather than irresponsible behaviour.</li> <li>Any further reduction in areas for CDW overall is likely to increase conflict.</li> </ul>  |

Table continued on next page.

| Questionnaire findings   | Implications for access management  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>58% of CDW would pay to walk dogs in places other dog walkers don't use.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CDW value walking in quieter areas away from other dogs.</li> <li>Landowners could derive income and reduce conflict by working with CDW to increase accessibility to such areas, for example by permitting dog walkers to drive closer to these areas.</li> <li>Further discussion on payment can be found in the report "Commercial Dog Walkers in the Outdoors: Attitudes, Engagement and Opportunities".</li> <li>A case study of Denny Commercial Dog Walkers investigates this subject.</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>71% of CDW knew about the Access Code. When given even more information, 80% said they were more likely to look at the Access Code website and tell clients about it.</li> </ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CDW are interested in the Access Code but need more support and information to better influence their own behaviour and influence other dog walkers.</li> <li>Raising awareness of and discussing other legislation relevant to dog walkers in a non-confrontational situation can encourage responsible behaviour.</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over 90% of CDW felt they should be involved in community-based responsible dog ownership schemes, such as Green Dog Walkers: <a href="http://www.greendogwalkers.org.uk">www.greendogwalkers.org.uk</a></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High level of interest and commitment from CDW to be environmentally sensitive in their work and to voluntarily support responsible dog ownership campaigns.</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>84% of CDW believe that accreditation would be good for business.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access authorities can work with CDW constructively to raise standards and reduce conflict through accreditation, if done in the right way.</li> </ul>   |

# 9 top tips for influencing commercial dog walkers



The following principles and approaches illustrate how best to influence where commercial dog walkers go, what they do, and how they can become ambassadors for responsible access by others. Further complementary guidance is also available from the National Access Forum<sup>7</sup>.

Every situation is different. Access authorities need to develop management strategies that reflect the local situation, including dog walker management policies adopted in adjacent access authority areas. Simply transplanting solutions from other areas is not guaranteed to work, so working with neighbouring authorities in a local context is usually essential.

- 1 Develop a multi-departmental approach:** Rarely will access staff be able to develop the most effective solutions on their own. A clear and consistent multi-disciplinary approach needs to be developed, which includes colleagues in animal welfare/dog warden services and the council's own estates, parks and greenspace teams.
- 2 Work with adjacent authorities:** Displacement of commercial dog walking activity between access authority areas is a likely result of restrictions or enforcement. To avoid simply moving and intensifying conflict, adjacent authorities need to co-operate to develop an effective strategic action plan. This can also result in a more cost-effective approach through pooling of resources, contacts and expertise.
- 3 Develop a targeted approach:** Gather and review data – even if just anecdotal – on the location, frequency, impact and perpetrators of conflict. It may not be an appropriate or effective use of resources to develop interventions targeting all dog walkers, if only a small number of people are responsible for conflict. Targeting action at those responsible may be a more effective and less contentious approach.
- 4 Be constructive from the start:** Influencing where walkers with dogs – commercial or otherwise – go and what they do, can often become a contentious and emotive issue. The nature of initial approaches and messages to dog walkers collectively, or individually, will usually set the tone for relationships with the access authority for years to come. It can be hard to recover from initial approaches that elicit a defensive response.
- 5 Promote the positive:** To ensure management outcomes and dialogue with commercial dog walkers is as constructive as possible, it is important that interventions show support for the positive things about dogs and dog walking, as well as dealing with the conflicts that prompted management action. Otherwise, actions can be perceived as anti-dog, alienating commercial dog walkers and other dog owners, and discouraging them from becoming part of the solution. This is especially important as dog walkers are more likely to be influenced by the advice and actions of their peers, rather than messages coming directly from an access authority.

- 6 Sell the added value to businesses:** The most persuasive interventions with commercial dog walkers will be those that also add value to their businesses, as this is a strong motivation for compliance. While reducing impacts on other visitors, wildlife and farm animals is a valid reason for influencing commercial dog walkers' behaviour, people are most likely to be compliant in a given situation if it is in their interest to do so.
- 7 Work with the dog walking community:** The Scottish Natural Heritage commercial dog walker project has identified the latent and generally untapped support for responsible access-taking in most commercial dog walkers. Exploiting this is a key way to avoid management changes being perceived as anti-dog and heightening conflict. Local dog walkers can also be a great source of information about what is happening, why, and by whom; however, it is important that access authority staff listen to dog walkers to elicit this information, rather than just tell them about the access authority's agenda. Community-based schemes such as [Green Dog Walkers](#) provide a constructive and effective way of promoting responsible access by all dog walkers.
- 8 Explore accreditation options:** Where commercial dog walkers as a whole need to be influenced, rather than just a few problematic operators, voluntary accreditation can be an effective approach, as demonstrated by East Lothian Council's 'Dog Watch' scheme. Schemes that include dog welfare issues and add value to commercial dog walking businesses are more likely to succeed, compared to those that more narrowly focus on stopping impacts on greenspace. Legal and resource issues mean that compulsory accreditation schemes for access to land are unlikely to be viable or effective at present.

Commercial dog walkers at the workshops expressed interest in being involved in discussions to set up accreditation schemes and were keen for approved schemes to publicise their contact details. Whilst this is an obvious opportunity for local authorities to work positively with commercial dog walkers in their areas and set up similar schemes, time and resource constraints may prevent this. A complementary national accreditation and training scheme for commercial dog walkers is being developed by the Kennel Club. For more information telephone 020 7518 1020 or email [kcdog@thekennelclub.org.uk](mailto:kcdog@thekennelclub.org.uk).

- 9 Monitor and evaluate:** Good evidence to support these approaches does already exist. However, further data on successes, especially using pre-intervention baseline data, will help refine these approaches for all access authorities. Data will also help make the case for additional resources by managers, elected members and grant-aiding bodies. Please let [Scottish Natural Heritage](#) know of any good examples you develop.



# References

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