

Dog Walker

Business Opportunity Profile

BOP308 · September 2025

Introduction

Professional dog walkers are responsible for exercising dogs on behalf of their owners. They typically provide solo walks, walks for dogs from the same household or group walks.

In some areas, dog walkers may be required to be licensed or registered with their local authority.

This profile provides information about starting up as a dog-walker. It describes the training available, the current market trends and the key trading and legal issues.

Qualifications and skills

Suitable courses for anyone starting up as a dog walker include:

- The Pet Sitting and Dog Walking Business Course, which is a distance-learning course provided by the National Association for Pet Sitters & Dog Walkers (NarpsUK). The course covers topics such as business set-up and management, branding, marketing and advertising, pet care and first aid, and animal law and business conduct. It costs £299 for non-members and £199 for NarpsUK members. Go to www.pet-sitting-and-dog-walking-courses.co.uk/mod/page/view.php?id=1403 for details.
- The Professional Dog Walkers' Certificate, which is an online course provided by the Pet Industry Federation. The course costs £180 and covers providing a professional service, transportation, risk assessments, health and safety, dealing with emergencies and canine health. The Go to www.pifeducation.co.uk/course/professional-dog-walkers-certificate for more information.
- The Dog Walkers & Sitters Association Certificate, which is an online course provided by the British College of Canine Studies. The course costs around £155 and covers basic training, body language and communication, dog law, setting up a dog-walking business and canine first aid. Go to www.britishcollegeofcaninestudies.com/product/the-dog-walkers-sitters-association-dwsa-certificate for more information.
- Transporting Dogs, which is an online course also provided by the Pet Industry Federation. The course costs £30 and covers the legal requirements of transporting dogs, safety and welfare, extreme weather and vehicle breakdowns. Go to www.pifeducation.co.uk/course/transporting-dogs-course for more information.
- Health and Safety for Pet Professionals, which is an online course also provided by the Pet Industry Federation. The course covers risk assessments, lone working and safety equipment. The course

costs £30. Go to www.pifeducation.co.uk/course/health-and-safety-for-pet-professionals for more information.

- Free videos and webinars provided by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC), which cover topics such as self-assessment and self-employment. Go to www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-webinars-email-alerts-and-videos for more information.

Key market issues and trends

Current market issues affecting start-up and established dog walkers include the following.

- In 2024, around 28% of UK households owned a dog, making it the most popular pet. In 2024, there were 10.6 million pet dogs in the UK compared to around 9.6 million in 2021 (www.pdsa.org.uk/what-we-do/pdsa-animal-wellbeing-report/uk-pet-populations-of-dogs-cats-and-rabbits).
- On average, dogs in the UK are walked six times a week. However, one in twenty owners don't walk their dogs at all, while around one in forty owners use a professional dog walker (www.dogster.com/statistics/dog-walking-statistics-uk).
- Demand for dog walking has been affected by the increase in remote and home working. As owners are generally at home more, demand for day-time walks by dog walkers has fallen, but flexible and on-demand walks have increased (www.narpsuk.co.uk/blog/how-remote-working-has-changed-pet-sitting-dog-walking-in-uk).
- Franchises provide both opportunities and competition for start-up dog walkers. Examples of franchises include Friends for Pets and Petpals. Go to www.friendsforpets.co.uk/franchising and <https://petpals.com/franchise-opportunity> for details. Investment fees are available on request from the franchisors.

Trading, commercial and legal issues

Start-up and established dog walkers face the following trading, commercial and legal issues.

Dog control legislation

Dog walkers must comply with the same legal responsibilities which apply to dog owners. For example, dog walkers must ensure that:

- When walking a dog in a public space, it is wearing a collar and tag indicating the owner's contact details.
- Dogs in their care do not attack or worry livestock on agricultural land.
- Dogs in their care do not cause injury or damage, for example by biting a person or another dog.
- Dogs in their care are protected from unnecessary pain, suffering and injury.

Dog walkers must also comply with local authority public space protection orders which can ban dogs from certain places such as beaches and children's play areas in public parks. The orders can also restrict the number of dogs that any single person can be in control of, and provide fixed penalties for dog fouling.

Local authority licensing

Some local authorities require professional dog walkers to be licensed or registered. For examples of local authorities that require dog walkers to be licensed or registered, go to www.lambeth.gov.uk/Business-rates-services-and-licensing/licensing-and-permits/Apply-change-or-pay-for-a-licence/Apply-for-an-animal-licence/professional-dog-walking-licence, www.edinburgh.gov.uk/commercialdogwalkersform and www.bromley.gov.uk/licences/dog-walking-licence.

Licensed or registered dog walkers are typically required to comply with a code of conduct. For example, the Royal Parks' Code of Conduct requires dog walkers to:

- Wear a licensed operator identification armband provided by the Parks Authority.
- Walk no more than four dogs at a time.
- Ensure that each dog they walk wears a collar and prescribed identification.
- Have a lead for each dog being walked.
- Clean up any dog waste and place it in dog waste bins.

Go to www.royalparks.org.uk/commercial-licences/dog-walking-licences/code-conduct-dog-walking for more information.

Trade bodies

Membership of a trade body indicates that a dog walker meets certain standards of professional competence, as well as providing a wide range of individual and business benefits. Relevant bodies and registers include:

- The National Association for Pet Sitters & Dog Walkers (NarpsUK, www.narpsuk.co.uk), which represents pet sitters and dog walkers in the UK. Membership benefits include a listing in the NarpsUK members directory, business management and accounting software, public liability insurance, access to criminal record checks, and help, support and guidance. Members must comply with the NarpsUK Code of Practice and Terms and Conditions. Membership fees start from £12 per month for basic membership.
- The Professional Dog Walkers Association (<https://professionaldogwalkersassociation.co.uk>), which represents dog-walking professionals across the UK. Membership benefits include business documentation and best practice guidance, a profile in the members directory and access to discounted business insurance and dog products. Annual individual membership costs £75.

- The National Register of Petcare Professionals (www.accreditedpetcareprofessional.org.uk), which is a register of qualified professionals such as dog walkers, kennel operators and groomers. Professionals who have been working within the industry for at least three years and have a recognised qualification can join as a full member. Annual membership fees start from £30.
- The Pet Industry Federation (<https://petfederation.co.uk>), which represents the UK pet industry. Membership benefits include a listing in the 'Find a Pet Business' directory, access to legal and tax helplines, business document templates and training. Annual membership fees are tiered depending on turnover and start from around £233.

Dog walkers' vans

Some dog walkers use a fitted-out van to pick up and drop off dogs. The most popular vans used by dog walkers include the Citroën Berlingo, the Renault Kangoo, the Peugeot Partner and the Ford Transit Connect. Go to www.autocapital.co.uk/blog/best-van-options-for-dog-walkers for more information.

Vans are usually fitted with cages or dividers. Dividers cost around £130, while cages cost between around £350 and £800, depending on the size and specification. For examples of dog cage suppliers, go to <https://transk9.com> and <https://dtboxes.co.uk>.

Second-hand vans fitted with cages and dividers are available from eBay and cost between £5,000 and £15,000 (www.ebay.co.uk/b/bn_7023057022).

Specialist software

Many dog walkers use specialist software to manage bookings and schedules, create invoices and store customer details, along with vet and vaccination information.

Examples of software include:

- Do Timely (<https://dotimely.com/free-dog-walking-pet-sitting-software/>).
- Pet Sitter Dashboard (<https://petsitterdashboard.com>).
- My Pet Walker (www.mypetwalker.co.uk).

Consumer and business protection legislation

Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, dog-walking services must be as described and of satisfactory quality.

The Business Protection from Misleading Marketing Regulations 2008 make it an offence for dog walkers to make unfair comparisons with other pet professionals.

Pricing and VAT

Dog walkers typically charge an average of between £10 and £15 for a 30-minute solo walk and between £15 and £25 for a 60-minute solo walk. The average price charged for a group walk is between

£8 and £12 per dog.

Go to <https://gowalkies.co.uk/how-much-to-charge-for-dog-walking-uk-2025-rates-guide> for more information about pricing.

Dog walking is standard-rated for VAT. Go to www.gov.uk/guidance/rates-of-vat-on-different-goods-and-services for more information about VAT rates.

Health and safety

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 place a duty of care on employers and the self-employed to protect the health and safety of anyone affected by their business activities, such as customers and members of the public.

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland, all employers, and those who are self-employed, are required to identify and assess any work-related risks. The Professional Dog Walkers Association has published guidance to help dog walkers manage risk, which is available at <https://professionaldogwalkersassociation.co.uk/About-Us/PDWA-Best-Practice.html>.

Insurance

Dog walkers require various types of insurance cover, as follows:

- Public liability insurance, which covers a dog walker against claims for compensation from anyone injured or adversely affected as a result of their activities.
- Care, custody and control of animals insurance, which provides cover against claims for compensation from customers for veterinary fees, the death of an animal, or if a pet is lost or stolen while in the dog walker's care.
- Legal expenses insurance, which covers a dog walker against claims for defending or pursuing disputes with local authorities or customers.
- Income protection insurance, which will pay an income if a dog walker is unable to work as a result of sickness or injury.
- Vehicle insurance, which includes cover for business use.

Insurers and brokers providing specialist insurance for dog walkers, which often includes general business insurance, include Petplan Sanctuary (www.petplansanctuary.co.uk/pet-business-insurance-policies/dog-walking-insurance) and Cliverton (www.cliverton.co.uk/policies/dog-walkers-insurance).

Legislation

This section provides an at-a-glance list of the key legislation that dog walkers must comply with.

Animal welfare and control

- Under the Animals Act 1971 and the Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, anyone in charge of a dog may be held legally liable if it causes injury or damage, for example by biting a person or another dog.
- The Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 and the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 place duties on anyone in charge of an animal to ensure that their welfare needs are met and to protect them from unnecessary suffering.
- Under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, local authorities in England and Wales can make public space protection orders banning dogs from certain areas, restricting the number of dogs that any single person can be in control of and providing fixed penalties for dog fouling. Similar powers for local authorities exist under the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.
- The Control of Dogs Order 1992 and the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 make it an offence to be in control of a dog in a public space that is not wearing a collar bearing its owner's contact details.
- The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 applies in England, Wales and Scotland and makes it an offence to be in charge of a dog that is dangerously out of control in any place, including private property. A similar offence is created in Northern Ireland under the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983.
- Under the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 and the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983, it is an offence to be in charge of a dog that attacks or worries livestock on agricultural land.

Consumer and business protection

- Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, dog walking must be carried out in locations described to the customer and last for the specified amount of time.
- The Business Protection from Misleading Marketing Regulations 2008 make it an offence for dog walkers to make unfair comparisons with other pet professionals.

Health and safety

- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 place a general duty of care on employers and the self-employed in relation to the health, safety and welfare of anyone else affected by their business activities, such as customers and members of the public.
- Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland, all employers, and those who are self-employed, are required to identify and assess any work-related risks.

Related factsheets

SEC020 Pets and Pet Care - Sector Update

BOP048 Boarding Kennel/Cattery

BOP382 Dog Home Boarder

MBP332 Pet Taxi

MBP408 Dog Daycare Centre

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