



# Candidate Pack

Recruitment Information for Trainee  
Habilitation Specialist Vacancies



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## Introduction

Firstly, we would like to thank you for your interest in working for Guide Dogs and especially in the role of Habilitation Specialist. It is an exciting time to be joining the charity with our refreshed 2025 strategy, 'Forward, Together'. Guide Dogs is doing more now than ever before to help people who are blind or partially sighted, gain freedom and independence to live the life they choose.

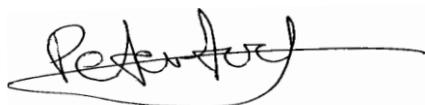
## What is Habilitation?

Habilitation involves one-to-one training for children and young people with a vision impairment. Starting from their existing skills, it aims to develop their personal mobility, navigation and independent living skills. At whatever age the training is started, the overriding goal is to maximise the child or young person's independence, opening the way in the future, to further study, employment and an independent life. ([Habilitation VI UK, 2021](#))

Habilitation Specialists assess, plan and carry out the delivery of training programs for children and young people (aged 0-25) with vision impairments. This will be specifically focused around an individual's mobility, orientation and daily living skills in their home as well as in public and educational settings.

As an organisation, we are the largest employer of Habilitation Specialists in the UK and regularly have opportunities for trainee and qualified positions. As a trainee your role will involve a combination of work-based learning and university study. On successful completion of the 3 years training, you will become a Qualified Habilitation Specialist and form part of an established community of like-minded professionals, working as part of one of our teams around the UK.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Lock', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Peter Lock**  
**Principal Habilitation Specialist (UK)**

## The Role of a Trainee Habilitation Specialist

As a Trainee Habilitation Specialist, you will be joining one of our well-established Habilitation teams who support children and young people with a vision impairment in a wide range of settings. This will provide you with the opportunity to observe, practice and start to develop your own understanding, knowledge and skills.

In addition to the practical elements, you will also be studying for professionally recognised qualifications at Birmingham City University, which are as follows:

### Year 1-2

#### Foundation degree in Rehabilitation Work (Visual Impairment)

The emphasis in the first two years is working with young people over 16 years and adults. During this time, you will also have the opportunity to work alongside our Vision Rehabilitation Specialists to gain further knowledge and experience relevant to the course.

Visit [Rehabilitation Work \(Visual Impairment\) - Higher Apprenticeship](#) on the Birmingham City University Website for more information about this course.

### Year 3

#### BSc Degree Habilitation Specialist (Children & Young People)

In your final year, your study and focus will be on habilitation support for babies and children, from assessing and delivering habilitation programmes in early years, to supporting key life transitions and working with those with additional and complex needs.

Visit [Qualified Habilitation Specialist \(Children and Young People\) - Top Up Degree - BSc \(Hons\)](#) on the Birmingham City University Website for more information about this course.

### Attending University

You will be required to attend the university campus for block week periods, with up to 8 weeks in the 1<sup>st</sup> two years and up to 3 weeks in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final year. In addition to attending the campus, joining online tutorials and lectures is also required, as well as being responsible for your own independent study.

Guide Dogs covers the costs of any course related fees, travel and accommodation during the 3-year training period.

## Traineeship and Role Requirements

To successfully apply for a Trainee Habilitation Specialist role and university courses, you will need to evidence at interview that you have a qualification of GCSE at grade 4 or above at English Language (or equivalent e.g. GCSE grade C, key skills level 2, adult literacy level 2 or CSE grade 1 will be accepted).

**Plus** one of the following:

- Level 3 NVQ/SVQ 6 or Diploma or equivalent (full award)
- 2 or more A-Levels/Highers (DD/48 UCAS tariff points) or a BTEC ordinary National Diploma
- Level 2 NVQ/SVQ 5 or Diploma (full award) plus a written paper (details of content will be provided by the admissions tutor post application)
- 5 GCSE/Standard /Grade/National 5 passes at grade 4 (grade C) or above plus a written paper (details of content will be provided by the admissions tutor post application).

**Please note:** For students residing in England, this course is offered as an apprenticeship. Candidates will need to ensure they meet the apprenticeship criteria. For more information on this please visit [Gov.uk - become an apprentice](https://www.gov.uk/become-an-apprentice)

For any queries on course content or university applications please contact: [rehabadmissionsquery@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:rehabadmissionsquery@bcu.ac.uk)

### How to Apply

If you have been inspired to apply, please go to: [www.guidedogs.org.uk/jobs](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/jobs) for details of current Trainee and Qualified Habilitation Specialist vacancies.

If you are successfully shortlisted and then offered a Trainee position, the job offer will be conditional on successfully obtaining a place on the foundation degree in Rehabilitation Work (Visual Impairment) at Birmingham City University and accepted on to the apprenticeship if living in England. There will be time after job offers are confirmed by Guide Dogs, to complete the BCU application and attend a separate interview at the university.

If you decide to apply, we look forward to meeting you if you are invited to an interview, and good luck!

## Guide Dogs Services



### Children and Young People Services

As well as our canine services, we have several other services provided in person to individuals with vision impairments. Habilitation Specialists form part of the Community Teams across the UK. We also have a central team that offers support for parents and families of CYP with Visual Impairment and can be accessed through Guide Line, our first point of contact telephone enquiry service, that provides a range of information, advice and support. This includes, living actively, living independently and living well. Please see web site for more information [Help for children and families | Guide Dogs](#)

### Habilitation Service

While sighted children learn about movement, mobility and managing the world around them by watching others, children with a vision impairment often need a little extra support. That is why we have developed, a range of habilitation services designed to help children and young people reach their full potential.

### Assistive Technology and Grants

Assistive technology includes laptops, tablets and computers, Braille devices, magnifying equipment, speech software, and multi-sensory items. Using adaptive tech can help young people with sight loss live life to the full at home, at school, or at university. That is why we help children and young people access a world of technology designed to suit their vision impairment, and we may even be able to help you fund it.

### Sensory Equipment

Using sensory equipment and apps will improve a child with a vision impairment's social, emotional and technological skills and have a positive effect on family relationships, interactions with friends and their school

life. We help you select the most appropriate sensory toys, apps and equipment, such as bubble tubes, dark dens and because we don't sell this equipment our advice is always independent and unbiased.

### **Educational Support**

Specialist education support team can offer information and advice tailored to the individual child. This helps parents/young people make their own informed decisions. Support may include advice on processes such as the Education, Health and Care Plan, annual reviews and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support in school.

### **Family Events**

Enable children and their families to meet, share experiences and have fun in a relaxed environment. They provide the opportunity to access expert advice from our children specialists.

### **Family Support**

Our Family Support team offers practical and emotional support, advice and information to the families of children with a visual impairment, as well as working with other professionals and organisations.

### **CustomEyes Books**

We don't believe a vision impairment should stop a child from knowing the joy of reading. That is why our CustomEyes Books in large print give them the chance to read a real book, just like everybody else. We have over 4,200 large print books available - and counting. Each one is custom made, with font size, spacing, colour and more; all tailored to a child's individual needs.



### **Canine Services**

Within our canine services, we have both the guide dogs, which we are best known for, as well as buddy dogs. Guide dogs provide people with sight loss the means to get out and about safely and confidently. Buddy

dogs for children, with vision impairment(s) help build confidence and self-esteem, but are not trained to perform any specific tasks.



## Meet our Team

### Kim's Story - Qualified Habilitation Specialist, Bristol Community Team



“My background is as a paediatric nurse, but whilst my son was growing up, I worked as a Teaching Assistant with pupils with Special Educational Needs in mainstream schools. That’s where I first met a Habilitation Specialist. I was working with a primary school pupil with a vision impairment and a Habilitation Specialist came in to work with her on her mobility and independent living skills. I knew after a few sessions that I wanted to be a Habilitation Specialist.

“As a Qualified Habilitation Specialist, I work with such a variety of children and young people with vision impairment from 0-25, teaching

them skills to lead more independent lives through mobility, orientation and independent living training, whether this be at their home, in school or in their local community environments. You can deliver advice, support and training to parents, carers, school staff and external agencies, to enable them to best support the children and young people you work with. The job is rewarding, with no two days being the same. Your assessment, planning and implementation of teaching can make a real difference to the confidence, independence and lives of the children and families you work with.

“Whenever I need advice or support in my role, as Guide Dogs is the biggest employer of Habilitation Specialists, I can go to the rest of the Bristol team of Habilitation Specialists, the regional team or the national team which means I have a huge bank of knowledge, skills and experience at my fingertips to utilise whenever needed. We have regular Continuous Professional Development (CPD) where we get training and the opportunity to share ideas which can form and change the way you practice. Becoming a Habilitation Specialist with Guide Dogs was one of the best decisions I ever made, and I look forward to being part of this amazing team for the rest of my working life.”

### **Loretta's Story - Habilitation Service Manager, Reading Team**



“After completing a BSc. degree in Animal Behaviour, I was looking on the Guide Dogs website at job opportunities when the Trainee Habilitation Specialist position caught my attention. I realised that this position would utilise my previous experience working with children and young people with disabilities within the classroom and coaching sports, plus the guide dog side of the role appealed to my background in animal behaviour. I hadn't previously worked with individuals with a vision impairment, but I soon realised that there are so many transferrable skills to working with

those with physical and learning disabilities.

“Following a two-year course at University College London to become qualified, I worked as a Habilitation Specialist assessing and teaching mobility, orientation and independent living skills to individuals with a vision impairment aged from birth to 25 years. It is an exciting role, working in the home, educational setting and the community. I was keen to have a job which involved more than just sitting at a desk in an office, and the habilitation profession certainly offers this.

“As well as producing and delivering individually tailored training programmes, we also organise events for groups of children and young people focusing on developing their habilitation skills. These might be cooking workshops; early years ‘Stay and Play’ sessions or public transport events. We also run workshops for parents to support their children at home, and for professionals to increase vision impairment awareness.

“I became a Senior Habilitation Specialist in 2020, providing technical supervision to colleagues and arranging CPD for the Southern region habilitation specialists. In 2023 I became a Habilitation Service Manager, managing a team of Habilitation Specialists.

“The job has allowed me to work with a wonderfully diverse array of people, of different ages and needs, with the potential to transform lives. Supporting individuals to develop skills which enable them to lead the life they choose and possibly empower them to become more involved in society is satisfying and hugely rewarding.

“The habilitation specialist role offers a lot of variety, and it gives you a chance to be continually creative; encouraging children to develop skills which are often repetitive requires innovative ideas to keep the activities fun and engaging. The job also offers a lot of opportunities to fine tune your problem-solving skills, and when a positive outcome is achieved it is a relief and gratifying!”

## Our Young People

### Caitlin's Story



Speaking about working with her Habilitation Specialist Emma, Caitlin, a service user says:

“I definitely feel more confident since I started working with Emma. I wouldn't have gone out at night if it wasn't for her. And the mobility skills have helped improved my judo performance too.”

Caitlin Leigh is no ordinary teenage girl. Her two passions in life are music and judo. She has written and performed her own songs to hundreds of people at music school, has her own YouTube channel, and she has been invited to train with the British judo visually impaired team as part of the Para-Potential Programme.

Surprisingly, Caitlin also has a severe vision impairment - she was born with congenital glaucoma and underwent almost 50 operations in her first five years. Her mum Claire vividly remembers the day Caitlin was diagnosed: “It was completely unexpected and when she had to be put to sleep at only five days old for major surgery, it was really frightening.”

Caitlin still has some useful vision in her right eye, but growing up with a serious vision impairment has not been easy. Starting school was particularly challenging as she lacked the confidence to join in with activities, and it was time consuming to get lesson materials adapted.

“The kids in primary school treated me differently,” she says. “I didn't get invited to sleepovers or to go out with them because their parents felt

uncomfortable and didn't know what to do.”

Guide Dogs was appointed by the local authority to support Caitlin from the age of five, starting with using mental mapping to find her way around school, and eventually progressing to long cane training. We also provided CustomEyes books so she could read her favourite stories such as David Walliams' *Mr Stink* in large print.

Claire says: “It wasn't until Guide Dogs became involved with Caitlin that we realised how much more they could offer than just the guide dog. We've been to their family experience days and they've made us aware of additional education support that Caitlin could receive. They really have been a lifeline.”

Caitlin developed an interest in music and judo from an early age. She loves writing songs and playing piano as a way of expressing her feelings and thoughts, and the highlight was performing in front of 300 people at her music school. She is just as happy competing in judo contests against both sighted and vision-impaired opponents. Caitlin won gold at the first national visually impaired judo competition in London in 2018 and one day, she hopes to compete at the Paralympics Games.

Caitlin's mum, Claire, smiles and says: “People can't believe how much drive and determination Caitlin has - she just wants to have a go at everything.”

Despite this, as Caitlin reached her teenage years, she was still experiencing confidence issues and needed some extra support to develop her independence. Luckily, help was at hand from Guide Dogs Habilitation Specialist, Emma Foster.

Emma explains: “When I first met Caitlin, she was self-conscious about using her cane and wasn't taking it out with her. She avoided going to busy places, going out in the dark, and meeting up with friends. So, I helped her come to terms with her sight loss and realise she can still do the things other teenagers do; she just has to do them in a slightly different way.”

Emma and Caitlin have been practicing cane training on the walk to her music lesson once a week, as well as travelling into town to meet friends. This includes using zebra crossings and identifying landmarks to help orientate herself. “In the school holidays we work on independent living skills such as baking, using an oven, and washing up,” Emma adds. “These are just some of the skills Caitlin will need as she gets older.”

Caitlin says: “I definitely feel more confident since I started working with Emma. I wouldn’t have gone out at night if it wasn’t for her. And the mobility skills have helped improve my judo performance too.”

Her mum Claire agrees: “It now feels like Caitlin is doing normal teen stuff, which I don’t think would have happened otherwise. Having a vision impairment needn’t stop you from doing anything and Caitlin is proof of this. She always says the vision impairment has to keep up with her, rather than the other way around.”

## **Benefits We Offer Our Employees**

We believe that wellbeing at work is about creating an environment to promote a state of contentment which allows all employees to flourish and achieve their full potential for the benefit of themselves and for Guide Dogs. As a member of staff, we offer you a wide range of benefits to suit your individual needs:

- 26 days holiday plus Bank holidays (rising to 28 days after 3 years’ service).
- Defined Contribution Personal Pension Plan - New employees, who meet the eligibility criteria, will be automatically enrolled into the DC Plan upon their third month of employment. The pension contribution level for automatic enrolment is 3% employee and 5% employer. However, once you are a member you may wish to increase your level of pension contribution and Guide Dogs will match your contribution plus 2%, up to a maximum of 9%.
- A choice of Flexible Benefits - An amount equivalent to 3% of salary is given to employees to purchase benefits through an on-line portal. There are a range of options to suit personal circumstances and preferences. These include: Gym Membership, Travel Insurance, Healthcare and Hospital Treatment Plan, Dental Insurance, Additional Life Assurance, Health Screening, buying and selling annual leave (up to 3 days), Cashback to salary (up to 2% of salary equivalent).
- Discounts and Cashback Scheme - Access to discounts on goods and retail vouchers and cashback on purchases for supermarkets, clothing, electrical goods, travel, eating out, insurance and much more.

- Employee Assistance Programme - A free-phone confidential helpline to provide unlimited access to advice, information and face to face counselling support, where appropriate.
- Occupational Sick pay - Enhanced above the statutory minimum, after probation.
- Occupational Maternity, Paternity and Adoption pay - Enhanced above the statutory minimum.
- Life Assurance - A core benefit of 4 times salary.
- Childcare Vouchers - Enabling National Insurance savings to be made on child care costs.
- Eye Care Vouchers - Free eyes tests and, if needed specifically for VDU work, a contribution towards glasses.
- Dogalogue 10% Discount - All employees are entitled to a 10% discount on orders from the Guide Dogs charity catalogue

## **Standard Recruitment Process**

### **Application**

Due to the nature of the work Guide Dogs does, the individuals we support can be children, young people or vulnerable adults. To ensure we protect them to the best of our ability we follow Safer Recruitment practices. This is the same recruitment practice used by schools.

A requirement of this practice is that we only accept completed application forms for candidates wishing to be considered for a role. The application form can be completed online via our job board. We do request that a current CV is also attached to support an application providing details of a full work history to ensure all gaps are accounted for.

Application forms should be used to clearly highlight how your skills and experience meet the requirements for the role. These are laid out within the person specification of the role description within this document. When addressing each criteria, ensure you use specific examples to evidence the specific skill or experience you are referring to.

## **Shortlisting and Assessment**

Applications will be reviewed by the recruiting manager as they come in. This will initially be a longlist against the essential criteria for the role. The applications that make it through the longlist, will then be reviewed in more detail against all the criteria (essential and desirable) to identify the highest scoring applications that will be shortlisted for invitation to interview.

Guide Dogs are a Disability Confident Employer. This means that any applicant that has declared a disability, and meets the essential criteria, will be offered an invite to interview. This will be irrelevant of how they rank in the shortlisting.

Once shortlisting is complete, all applicants will receive communication from Guide Dogs, usually by email, to advise of the outcome of their application.

All roles will involve a face-to-face interview, in person or virtually. However, some may be preceded by a telephone interview. Some roles will involve other assessment exercises as well. The assessment process followed varies role by role. The assessment exercises used are tailored to be able to find the most suitable candidate for the job role. They are also designed to give applicants more insight into the role requirements to ensure they have realistic expectations of the position and that it is suitable for them as well.

Dependant on the reasons behind the assessment process design, shortlisted candidates may complete all exercises before being informed of an outcome, or they may be reviewed after each stage and only some individuals progress to the next exercise.

As with the long and shortlisting exercise, all applicants will receive communication from Guide Dogs, usually by email, to advise of the outcome of their assessment.

## **Job Offer**

Once all assessments have been completed, results for all applicants in consideration will be reviewed by the recruitment panel and a decision will be made about the most suitable person for the role. If successful, the recruiting manager will be in contact to congratulate you and discuss the offer details. Once accepted, pre-employment checks will be carried out, including a full 5-year professional reference history and a disclosure check if applicable for the role.

## **Onboarding**

The successful candidate will be provided with an official offer letter, and their terms of employment for review, signing and return. This will be subject to all pre-employment checks being completed, returned and deemed satisfactory.

Once a signed contract has been returned, the successful candidate will be advised further of their onboarding process and start date if this was not included in the contract.

## **Feedback**

All candidates are welcome to request feedback on their application or interview/assessment. To do so, please use the contact details below, specifying the role to which the request relates.

If there is a large volume of candidates, feedback on application may take us a while to provide, especially if the recruitment process is ongoing.

To support career development, candidates that have declared a disability, or are internal, will be contacted by the recruiting manager to offer the provision of feedback. Please advise if you would like this, and in what format would be most helpful.

## **Reasonable Adjustments**

At any stage in the recruitment process, if you any require reasonable adjustments please contact the recruiting manager, or the People Service Centre on the details below, and this can be discussed in more detail to identify the most suitable way to support you.

## **Contact Details**

People Service Centre

Phone - 01189838837 ext.3 for the Resourcing Team, or ext. 1 for general enquiries.

Email - [peopleservicecentre@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:peopleservicecentre@guidedogs.org.uk)

To enable us to help you as efficiently as possible, please include the vacancy ID number, job title and location in your communication as well as your full name, as used in your application.

**End of document.**