

# **Coordinated Accessibility Strategy**

**Drafting Phase Feedback Report**

# Overview

This report summarizes the feedback received during the drafting phase of the 2024-2025 consultation to renew Carleton's Coordinated Accessibility Strategy (CAS).

## Consultation Meetings

A total of 5 consultation sessions were hosted for members of the Carleton community, with 6 additional sessions being cancelled due to no registrations. Sessions were offered for:

- Faculty and staff
- Students
- Racialized students
- International students
- Indigenous students
- Students with disabilities

The sessions included a combination of open sessions for the campus community and closed sessions for equity-denied groups. In total, more than 36 people participated in the open and closed consultations.

The objective of these sessions was to host a supportive space wherein members of the university community could provide their feedback on the CAS. To provide insight into how the feedback from the consultation sessions was solicited, we have included the outline of the consultation presentation with the question list for these sessions in Appendix A.

## Online Feedback

In addition to in-person sessions, the Carleton University community was able to submit feedback by email or anonymously via an online form. During the drafting phase, there were 14 anonymous form submissions and 2 emailed responses.

# Feedback Received

The combined feedback received during the drafting phase aligned the following themes:

1. Clarity and measurability of objectives and recommendations
2. Accommodation and support for employment and employee support
3. Accommodations and support for students with disabilities
4. Opportunities in education and training
5. Implementation
6. Physical campus

In the following sections, the feedback has been consolidated into an aggregate summary of key points. Based on feedback from the community, a response has been provided for each summarized piece of feedback to support clarity.

# 1. Clarity and measurability of objectives and recommendations

## Feedback Theme A

### Summary:

- Concerns were shared regarding the clarity and measurability of objectives and recommendations, in particular the absence of specific, measurable goals to address accessibility needs on campus.
- Lack of clear action plans and defined roles, prioritization and timelines across the areas of focus made it feel unclear as to what the university would be doing to improve accessibility.

### Response:

- The CAS serves as a strategic compass, outlining broad, long-term recommendations and objectives aimed at creating a more accessible campus. It provides direction and guiding principles for the actions and initiatives that will follow during the strategy's implementation.
- Purpose of the strategy has been added to the Acknowledgement section of the CAS, and the details provided in the Implementation and Evaluation section have been expanded.
- Specific actionable steps will be developed and carried out during the implementation phase of the CAS. As part of implementation and reporting back, the CAS states that action plans formed by working groups will be shared with the community.

## Feedback Theme B

### Summary:

- It was suggested that the strategy explain terms such as universal design for learning (UDL) and the physical campus audit.

### Response:

- The revised CAS now explains key terms such as UDL (Education and Training Area of Focus) and the physical campus audit (Physical Campus Area of Focus).

## 2. Accommodation and support for employment and employee support

### Feedback Theme A

#### Summary:

- The feedback identified a need for comprehensive, mandatory training for managers, department chairs and Human Resource (HR) staff to address systemic and interpersonal factors related to accessibility, accommodations and equity.

#### Response:

- Feedback has been captured in the following strategic actions under the Employment and Employee Support area of focus:
  - Build capacity, knowledge and resources for managers, department chairs and HR staff to support employees with disabilities, including specialized expertise on equitable workplace accommodations
  - Provide training and guidance on disability inclusion across all work environments, including understanding the spectrum and diversity of visible- and non-visible disabilities

### Feedback Theme B

#### Summary:

- Establish an independent, neutral figure trained in human rights and disability to assist employees in negotiating accommodations. This role would help employees navigate leave and accommodations for disabilities and should have advanced qualifications such as MSW, MEd, or MPsys.

#### Response:

- This is captured in the following strategic action under the Employment and Employee Support area of focus:
  - Build capacity, knowledge and resources for managers, department chairs and HR staff to support employees with disabilities, including specialized expertise on equitable workplace accommodations

## Feedback Theme C

### Summary:

- Improvements are needed in the accommodations process, such as the identification of the office of responsibility and defined roles (e.g., HR, departments, managers, supervisors and employees).

### Response:

- Clarity around specific processes, roles and responsibilities would be captured in the implementation of the strategy as part of the following two strategic actions under the Employment and Employee Support area of focus:
  - Identify and respond to gaps in employment-related policies, procedures and practices that support accessibility, accommodations and disability-competent inclusion across all stages of employment
  - Regularly review, improve and implement timely communication of clear, effective and consistent processes, including roles and responsibilities, for workplace accommodations, so that employees with disabilities feel supported in all work environments

## Feedback Theme D

### Summary:

- The Functional Abilities Form (FAF) should be updated and be more akin with specialized forms like at the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities.
- The FAF should support employees with mental health conditions and episodic or chronic disabilities by allowing for flexibility in accommodations rather than fixed adjustments.
- Recognize permanent disabilities in FAF and eliminate the need for annual resubmission of the form.

### **Response:**

- Changes to specific forms and procedures would be addressed in the implementation of the strategy as part of the following strategic action under the Employment and Employee Support area of focus:
  - Identify and respond to gaps in employment-related policies, procedures and practices that support accessibility, accommodations and disability-competent inclusion across all stages of employment

## **Feedback Theme E**

### **Summary:**

- Centralize the accommodations equipment purchasing process within HR to standardize and simplify the process, particularly during internal position changes.

### **Response:**

- Changes to specific forms and procedures would be addressed in the implementation of the strategy as part of the following strategic action under the Employment and Employee Support area of focus:
  - Identify and respond to gaps in employment-related policies, procedures and practices that support accessibility, accommodations and disability-competent inclusion across all stages of employment

## **Feedback Theme F**

### **Summary:**

- All procedures should ensure compliance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) and the Ontario Employment Standards Act.
- Call for updates to the Carleton University Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities Policy that would reflect the above feedback.

### **Response:**

- Updates as needed would be captured in the implementation of the strategy as part of the following strategic action under the Employment and Employee Support area of focus:
  - Identify and respond to gaps in employment-related policies, procedures and practices that support accessibility, accommodations and disability-competent inclusion across all stages of employment
- The Department of Equity and Inclusive Communities will be leading the process and consultations to renew and update the Carleton policy for Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities.

### **Feedback Theme G**

#### **Summary:**

- All the above should be clearly communicated on the HR website.
- All the above updates need to be applied to the entire employee community at Carleton, including those in contract positions, and should represent the spectrum and diversity of disability.

### **Response:**

- These points are captured as part of the following strategic action under the Employment and Employee Support area of focus:
  - Regularly review, improve and implement timely communication of clear, effective and consistent processes, including roles and responsibilities, for workplace accommodations, so that employees with disabilities feel supported in all work environments



### 3. Accommodations and support for students with disabilities

#### Feedback Theme A

##### Summary:

- The draft strategy did not mention expanding student accommodations.

##### Response:

- The first objective in Student Support Services area of focus has been updated as follows:
  - Continue to provide and strive to improve on comprehensive supports for students with disabilities and accessibility expertise across all student services to fully support students with disabilities to achieve their personal, professional and academic potential

#### Feedback Theme B

##### Summary:

- Specific considerations were shared emphasizing the importance of providing built-in accommodations for students with learning disabilities and neurodivergent students. One suggestion provided was to grant students a set number of grace days per semester, allowing flexibility without requiring repeated requests for extensions. The current system of requesting extensions, even for just a 24-hour period, can create stigma for neurodivergent students by forcing them to perform as if they were neurotypical, highlighting their differences and potentially adding stress. Overall grace days were seen as a mechanism to reduce stigma and provide more autonomy for students.

##### Response:

- Specific considerations and accommodations would be addressed as part of the implementation of the strategy in the following strategic action under the Student Support Services area of focus:
  - Review standards and address gaps in service across student-facing departments and units and clearly outline roles, expectations and responsibilities regarding accommodations for students with disabilities

## Feedback Theme C

### Summary:

- Awards need to be available to a wider group, including students with non-permanent disabilities, ensuring a more inclusive approach that recognizes diverse needs beyond physical or permanent disabilities.

### Response:

- Details regarding awards would be addressed as part of the implementation of the strategy in the following strategic action under the Student Support Services area of focus:
  - Review standards and address gaps in service across student-facing departments and units and clearly outline roles, expectations and responsibilities regarding accommodations for students with disabilities

## 4. Opportunities in education and training

### Feedback Theme A

#### Summary:

- Issues were identified within education and training regarding working in silos and the impact of those silos on creating a cohesive action plan. Moving forward, it will be important to secure buy-in from all members in the teaching and learning environment by making accessibility part of job responsibilities.
- The feedback emphasized that advocacy at the top management level within Faculties and Departments is crucial for advancing accessibility initiatives.

#### Response:

- Implementation of the strategy will have working groups that reinforce the importance of building a cohesive approach that includes both top-down advocacy (buy-in from senior leadership) and bottom-up empowerment (educators engaged in implementation). The working groups will also challenge a siloed approach to planning. This change is reflected in the Implementation section of the CAS.

### Feedback Theme B

#### Summary:

- Instructors need to be empowered to understand the importance of inclusive design and be actively engaged in its implementation.

#### Response:

- This feedback aligns with the following strategic action under the Education and Training Area of Focus:
  - Provide incentives, skills and resources for educators to consider universal design for learning and digital accessibility in the creation and delivery of academic activities and experiential learning

## 5. Implementation

### Feedback Theme A

#### Summary:

- Composition of the Advisory Committee group should be expanded to include a broader range of student involvement, as having only an undergraduate and a graduate representative does not adequately reflect the diverse experiences of disabled students on campus.
- There should be an open call for recruitment to ensure a more inclusive and representative advisory group.

#### Response:

- An advisory group will be in place and people will be able to self-nominate to participate in this group, including the student population. There will be an operations team that ensures that there is diverse and adequate representation of the university community. Additionally, there may be opportunities for members of the Carleton community to engage at the working group level. These changes are outlined in the Implementation section of the CAS.

## 6. Physical campus

### Feedback Theme A

#### Summary:

- Campus currently does not meet the minimum requirements for accessibility in several areas. For example, there are instances where accessible door mechanisms are either not functioning or are non-existent.
- Many necessary wayfinding supports are missing, which can hinder navigation for individuals with disabilities.
- Ensure repairs and corrections meet the minimum standards and are conducted in a timely manner.

#### Response:

- Campus is made up of an aging infrastructure. Where possible, the university has been able to incorporate accessibility standards into upgrades. However, the extent to which those accessibility standards can be incorporated is sometimes dictated by the age of the building and its configuration.
- Carleton is guided by the Accessibility for Ontarians Act, as well as the Ontario Building Code and the Ontario Fire Code, both of which have changed significantly over time. All Carleton's buildings are designed to meet those codes at the time of construction.
- Wayfinding concerns will be part of the following strategic action under the Physical Campus area of focus:
  - Enhance the clarity and consistency of wayfinding across campus to improve navigation, including signage, campus building pages and digital maps

## Feedback Theme B

### Summary:

- Questions were raised surrounding the ongoing audits of the campus, including knowing when the retrofits will be done, what barriers were identified as part of the audit and whether disabled students were included to ensure the data was accurate.
- A dedicated amount of capital budget is needed each year to resolve accessibility issues.
- The audits and subsequent improvements need to consider structural and sensory elements, with a focus on enhancing wayfinding through the installation of accessible signage, improved digital maps and clearer campus building information.

### Response:

- The national standard that is being used to conduct audits of buildings on campus provides a more comprehensive and rigorous assessment than the minimum standards in existing codes. Furthermore, the standards are informed by living experience of disability and consider structural and sensory elements, as well as wayfinding.
- It is anticipated the audits will be completed in 2025.
- As funds become available to upgrade infrastructure on campus, the university is committed to completing upgrades that incorporate current accessibility requirements.
- There is a Dedicated Access Fund that is supported by both undergraduate, graduate and administrative funds. This Fund aims to address critical accessibility needs, primarily with the infrastructure.

## Feedback Theme C

### Summary:

- When will the accessible design standard be adopted and what it will include?

### Response:

- Carleton is guided by the facility accessible design standards (FADS) developed by Brock University.
- The university is also participating in a provincial project conducting an environmental scan of FADS and will be reviewing the recommendations from that project in 2025.

# Appendix A: Information and Feedback

## Session Agenda

Duration: 45 minutes

1. Welcome, land acknowledgement, introductions
2. Purpose of the coordinated accessibility strategy
3. Overview of the listening phase results
4. Feedback questions for the draft strategy
  1. What are your initial thoughts about the strategy?
  2. What do you see as areas of strength in the strategy?
    - Prompt: Are there specific objectives and recommendations that resonate with you?
  3. How could the strategy be further strengthened?
    - Prompt: Are there any specific objectives or recommendations that can be improved upon or are missing?
  4. Other feedback?
5. CAS Renewal Timeline
6. Closing Remarks