

AQAC RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

2026

Prepared by

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INTRODUCTION

Accessibility Queen's Advisory Council (AQAC) is a student-led advisory council that provides student input to guide accessibility-related decisions, goals and actions across Queen's University. It consists of eight students with disabilities, one staff member from the

Queen's Human Rights and Equity Office (HREO) (advisor), the Alma Mater Society's (AMS) Social Issues Commissioner-Internal (ex-officio), and AMS Accessibility Initiatives Lead (chair).

The scope of AQ would cover matters related to academic accessibility services, build environment, digital accessibility, accessible learning, student retention and support, and any other initiatives and issues impacting students with disabilities and their voices at the University.

The following document is a report developed and approved by the 2025-2026 Accessibility Queen's Student Advisory Council, with support and coordination by the AMS Social Issues Commission.

The report outlines the AQAC's perspectives, concerns and recommendations for upholding AODA compliance and promoting accessibility at Queen's University.

In writing this report, the AQAC recognizes that there are ongoing discussions and projects, run by Queen's University, to identify and address gaps for accessibility on campus (e.g., the Academic Accommodations Action Team, the ACE committee and the 2022 Postsecondary Education Standards). The AQAC aims to bridge the voices of students with disabilities to all stages of Queen's accessibility work and decision-making, and ensure that "nothing about us without us"

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METHODOLOGY

The AQAC met 4 times between Feb 6 and Apr 10, 2026. Over the course of these months, the AQAC met to discuss the priorities of students with disabilities on campus which were then distilled into two main themes for the 2025-2026 year: **Access to Services and Accessible Teaching & Learning**. Similar to a semi-structured focus group, an hour was spent discussing each theme. The AMS SIC-Internal and Accessibility Initiative Lead met outside of the meetings to code the discussions and lived experiences into gaps, examples and recommendations that were used to develop this report. The report was brought back to the AQAC for amendments and the recommendations were unanimously approved through a formal voting process.

Any questions and inquiries can be directed to sic.internal@ams.queensu.ca.

Theme 1: Access to Services

Date of AQAC Meeting: March 3, 2026

General Student Supports

Overview of all University support services (including and beyond Student Affairs)

GAPS & TESTIMONIES	RECOMMENDATION
No dedicated, non-academic student supports for students with disabilities: “There is no community for students with disabilities at Queen’s” Perceived fragmented information, progress and internal communication across university departments for student accessibility Unclear and inaccessible communication (mainly siloed to broad digital outreach and orientation-heavy promotion)	1. Hire an Academic Advisor specific to students with disabilities and offer drop-in hours during stressful time periods such as course selection and midterm/finals seasons. 2. Identify and streamline information on accessibility services for students into one single-entry-point website, including student-specific details on what each service (e.g., HREO can explain AODA obligations and accommodation policies to students seeking assistance, or Ombudsperson can assist in appeals) 3. Create and disseminate Separate Staff-Facing (Internal) and Student-Facing (External) Guides on accessibility supports (beyond only QSAS) for students with disabilities on campus 4. Create a Plan for Establishing a Dedicated Physical and Social Space for (and in consultation with) students with disabilities to seek community and supports, beyond academic accommodations (QSAS) or education (HREO), with appropriate staffing and resources

GAPS & TESTIMONIES	RECOMMENDATION
Limited staff training on supporting students with disabilities; unfair burden on other equity centers to support students with disabilities. "Accessibility Hub isn't centralized enough: there are accessibility resources on the Student Wellness Services page and the Accessibility page"	5. Facilitate at Least One Annual, Structured Focus Group between each campus service representative and AQAC to strengthen ongoing relationships and ensure student input is meaningfully integrated, with equitable compensation provided for student participation. 6. Vitalize the Student-Facing Access Community, and Equity (ACE) Working Group to remove silos in internal communications for student-facing support services and intentionally review student accessibility beyond academic accommodations. This group should be meeting monthly, with adequate representation from students, staff, and administration. 7. Collaborate on peer-led support in navigating academic accessibility processes (e.g., booking meeting with QSAS), such as offering trainings to AMS Peer Support Centre volunteers and Academic Affairs Centre (previously Academic Grievance Centre). .



QSAS (Queen's Student Accessibility Services)

"Provides **academic accommodations** to students when functional impacts arise from a disability and create a barrier in the academic environment" from QSAS Website

GAPS & TESTIMONIES	RECOMMENDATION
Confusion in websites for student accessibility supports (QSAS vs Accessibility Hub) Inconsistent advisor continuity (e.g., 3 advisors in 1.5 years): "I had to go through multiple advisors, so I constantly had to repeat my situation, it's exhausting and confusing." Long appointment wait times (e.g., unavailable for up to 6 weeks): "Booking an appointment online is extremely difficult; I often have to go in person just to schedule something, but even then, the wait time is terrible" Perceived lack of connection/communication between QSAS, SWS and ATC Lack of clarity on QSAS' role and scope for supporting students with disabilities: "QSAS doesn't offer accessibility supports beyond accommodations"	1. Review what information students see on QSAS vs Accessibility Hub and clarify the role of QSAS in all promotions 2. Rename to Queen's Student Accommodation Services, to set more accurate expectations of what QSAS offers and highlight the lack of accessibility services at Queen's. 3. Develop Advocacy Supports/Toolkits, in Collaboration with the HREO and student groups, in navigating classroom accommodations 4. Integrate QSAS Presence into Existing Campus Programming and in high-traffic campus spaces (e.g., club fairs, residence events, faculty orientations) through brief pop-ups or information tables, rather than creating standalone events. 5. Offer informal drop-in sessions (both in-person and online), allowing students to ask questions, seek guidance, or be directed to appropriate services, especially during high intensity periods (e.g., orientation, exams)

Adaptive Technology Centre (ATC)

Provides a dedicated quiet study area for students with disabilities;
home of Library Accessibility Services

GAPS & TESTIMONIES	RECOMMENDATION
Low awareness and visibility among students with disabilities: "I'm registered with QSAS, but was never made aware of a space like ATC" Stigma from high physical visibility of location: "I considered using the ATC, but everyone can see me using it, and I felt self-conscious." Limited referrals from QSAS: "No one really tells you how to get access unless you jump through a lot of hoops."	1. Develop and conduct a review of privacy in accessing ATC space, in consultation with student users 2. Develop and Communicate Internal Expectations (ex. Between QSAS and ATC) regarding student access to ATC, grounded in student experience and gathered data 3. Conduct a Scan of All External Communications on ATC, and develop a communications plan in collaboration with Student Affairs 4. Develop and Implement a Standardized Data Collection System for the ATC to track usage patterns (e.g., frequency, duration, peak times, and unmet demand), in order to inform evidence-based decision-making for resource allocation and future expansion.



Student Wellness Services (SWS)

Offers confidential, and integrated programs and service that are responsive to student health and wellness needs

GAPS & TESTIMONIES	RECOMMENDATION
Limited guidance on external wellness supports and services: “I had trouble navigating external therapy resources; it’s not clear where to start and the SWS staff also don’t seem to know” Notable lack of trust in its booking system and continuity of care: “Calling to book an appointment is frustrating, and in-person booking doesn’t help much either.” ADHD support group no longer facilitated by an occupational therapist under SWS (now under SASS): “The group used to be really helpful, but now it doesn’t feel that way”	1. Incorporate Training on External Wellness Services for SWS staff (e.g., finding faith-based counsellors, or specialists) 2. Embed Realistic Booking Expectations within webpage and external communications (before clicking on the bookings pages) 3. Establish Supports for Neurodivergent Students facilitated by trained professionals (e.g., Occupational Therapists), with flexible scheduling models. 4. Train SWS Staff on offering alternative supports to students who are unable to see a healthcare professional in a timely manner



Human Rights & Equity Office (HREO)

Coordinates HDV reporting, advisory services, education, and training

GAPS & TESTIMONIES	RECOMMENDATION
Low awareness and understanding of reporting process or advisory supports: "I don't really know what HREO does or what support I would get if I went there." Perceived duty to "protect" the University or conflict of interest to the client: ""I'm nervous about reporting anything; I feel like I have to justify myself to the University." Fear of escalation and emotional burden resulting from engaging in a confusing process	1. Increased Clarity on the services of the HREO (what does it offer) 2. Conduct a Scan of All External Communications from HREO, and develop a student-facing communications plan and advisory group in collaboration with Student Affairs and student leaders

Theme 2: Accessible Teaching & Learning

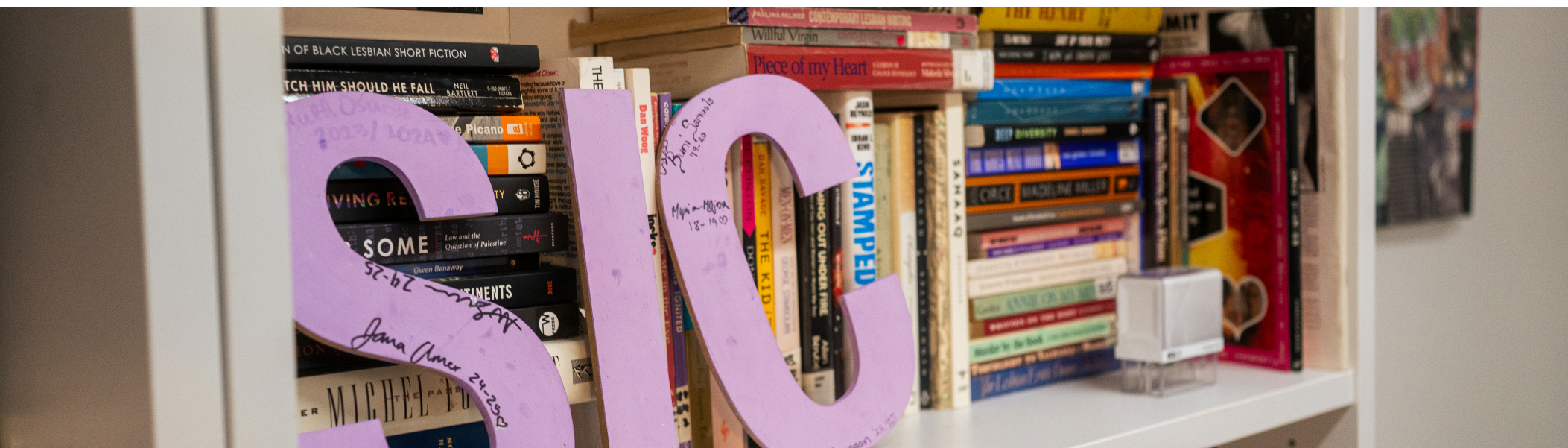
Date of AQAC Meeting: March 25, 2026

Curriculum Delivery

Course design, materials, and delivery should follow Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, ensuring content is accessible, structured, flexible, and inclusive by default. This includes accessible materials, modular course design, diverse teaching methods, and equitable assessment structures.

GAPS & TESTIMONIES	RECOMMENDATION
Accessibility is inconsistent and highly dependent on individual instructors rather than institutional standards: "Experience is faculty and professor-dependent." Course materials are often inaccessible (e.g., scanned PDFs, missing notes): "Professors often provide textbooks, but PDFs are not accessible." "Text to audio does not work."	1. Mandate Instructors to Provide Clear, Accessible Instructions for how to access all required course materials including where to access, any associated costs, and timelines/deadlines for accessing and purchasing materials, with this information explicitly included in the syllabus and on onQ. 2. Incorporate Modular Course Design in high-population courses (e.g., CHEM 112), by integrating structured, weekly modules that clearly distinguish required/testable vs. supplementary content and outline key learning objectives. This recommendation supports students to revisit content, learn at their own pace, and engage with material in a more predictable and accessible format, with potential for a work study student or placement. 3. Introduce Faculty-Level Guidelines and Standards for UDL in Assessments, including a cap on high-stakes exam weighting (e.g., $\leq 50\%$) and fewer cumulative exams, where possible, to reduce structural barriers while maintaining academic integrity.

GAPS & TESTIMONIES	RECOMMENDATION
Teaching/assessment methods frequently rely on a single mode (e.g., exams, presentations, lectures), increasing reliance on retroactive accommodations. “Never have notes uploaded to onQ from QSAS note-taking service.”	4. Establish a Principal’s Teaching Award for Impact/Innovation in Accessible Learning, recognizing instructors who demonstrate excellence in UDL and accessible course design, while also reviving the Steve Cutway Accessibility Award to be jointly administered through AIL/SIC. This dual recognition approach helps drive faculty buy-in, elevate accessibility as a marker of teaching excellence, and embed a culture of inclusive teaching across faculties. 5. Develop instructor-facing UDL training opportunities (e.g., workshops and drop-in sessions) that support faculty in diversifying methods of presenting information and engaging students, moving beyond passive modules/lectures toward interactive, practical learning. These sessions should focus on real course applications (e.g., alternative assessments, flexible delivery methods, accessible content design) and be integrated into existing teaching development structures, in collaboration with compensated students with disabilities.



Navigating Accommodations

Students should be able to access and implement accommodations through **clear, consistent, and supportive systems**, without excessive reliance on self-advocacy.

GAPS & TESTIMONIES	RECOMMENDATION
Accommodation implementation is inconsistent. Students face delayed responses, unclear processes, and must navigate complex systems independently: "My professor doesn't consider accommodations." "Some course emails have delayed response times..." Accountability mechanisms for accommodations exist but are not clearly communicated. "They said during lecture that they do not believe in accommodations" "Even though I had an accommodation for presentations, I was still told I had to present in front of the class. There wasn't really another option given, and it made me really anxious because it didn't align with my accommodation."	1. Clearly Communicate and Promote Institutional Accountability Mechanisms for accommodation implementation, beyond written policy, ensuring students understand their rights and available recourse. 2. Establish and Publicize Accommodation-related Communication Standards for QSAS, Instructors and Students, including response-time guidelines, and mandate auto-reply systems for accommodation-related emails. Auto-replies should include: • Expected response timelines • Interim measures (e.g., temporary flexibility, alternative supports) • Guidance on how students can advocate for or support themselves if urgent (e.g., redirecting to department chair, HREO, Associate Dean) 3. Develop Student-Facing Self-Advocacy & Escalation Guides, including clear flowcharts (who to contact and when). 4. Develop Instructor-Facing Best Practices for Accommodation Implementation, including what to do when requests are missed or delayed, guidelines on deferred midterms and finals, and respectful communications with students.

GAPS & TESTIMONIES	RECOMMENDATION
“Even though I had an accommodation for presentations, I was still told I had to present in front of the class. There wasn’t really another option given, and it made me really anxious because it didn’t align with my accommodation.” “I wasn’t allowed to defer my midterm, resulting in a high-weighted final that made it even harder to accommodate later on.”	5. Introduce a Dedicated Student-Facing Accessibility Communications Role (e.g., Work-Study or Placement Position) to improve awareness, outreach, and clarity around processes and supports. 6. Revitalize the QSAS Note-Taking Program by implementing a certificate-based incentive model (informed by <u>Western University’s model</u>): • Students must submit notes consistently across all 12 weeks to obtain Certificate/CCR recognition • Automated reminders for missed submissions 7. Implement Faculty/Instructor Accessibility Awareness Campaigns to shift culture and address stigma/misconceptions, in collaboration with student groups (e.g., amplifying testimonies, reiterating AODA and mandatory accessibility expectations, and positioning accommodations as essential access measures rather than exceptions)



Accessible Technology

Institutional technologies (onQ, ATC, QSAS systems) should proactively enable accessibility and reduce reliance on retroactive accommodations.

GAPS & TESTIMONIES	RECOMMENDATION
Accessibility tech supports (e.g., ATC conversions) are reactive and dependent on student awareness. Many students are unaware of available services, and delays in conversion create inequitable access. Platforms do not consistently enforce accessibility standards.	1. Provide Instructor-Facing Accessible Technology Toolkits (templates, guides, and tools for efficient implementation), beyond trainings. 2. Integrate an Automated Accessibility Checker within onQ that flags inaccessible materials prior to release, particularly for PDFs, Word documents, and other commonly uploaded files, similar to Turnitin, so that instructors receive real-time feedback on issues (e.g., scanned text, missing alt text, poor formatting) before materials are made available to students. 3. Revitalize Accessible Instruction for Educators training to increase relevancy and integrate student lived realities in the classroom, for example: • Narratives that clearly communicate relevancy, value, legal duty, and practical implementation of accommodations (being sensitive and truthful to the lived experiences of students) • Collaboration with student groups on what students want included in instructor training (e.g., what students wish instructors knew)