

Queen's University Academic Accommodations Interim Working Group Final Report and Recommendations

Prepared by the Academic Accommodations Interim Working Group

May 23, 2025

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	3
Findings and Recommendations.....	4
Topic 1. Options to meet course requirements.....	4
Topic 2. Retroactive accommodations.....	6
Topic 3. 7-day extension accommodations	7
Topic 4. Responsibility beyond course instructors	7
Topic 5. Confidentiality and intellectual property	9
Next Steps and Implementation	11
Appendix A: Membership of the Academic Accommodations Interim Working Group.....	12

Executive Summary

As a first step in responding to the external review of the Queen's academic accommodations policies and procedures, the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic) formed the Academic Accommodations Interim Working Group. The group was tasked with proposing solutions to the issues identified in Recommendation 9 in the report, which the external reviewers noted were the most pressing.

This report outlines the working group's findings and recommendations across five key areas, including options to meet course requirements, retroactive accommodations, extension accommodations, responsibilities beyond course instructors, and confidentiality and intellectual property in relation to the tools available to assist students who have accommodations to audio record lectures.

The working group's efforts were driven by the goals of ensuring students' accommodation needs were met and simplifying procedures for faculty and staff involved in the accommodation process.

To lead the implementation of these recommendations, the Provost will appoint a Special Advisor (Student Academic Accommodations and Considerations). Working closely with the Provost, Vice-Principal (Culture, Equity and Inclusion), the Vice-Provost and Dean of Student Affairs, and students, faculty, and staff, the Special Advisor will also play an important role in clarifying critical aspects of academic accommodations processes and identifying sound processes, practices, and initiatives that can be implemented across the university.

By advancing this work, Queen's University reaffirms its commitment to accessibility, equity, and student success, while ensuring that faculty and staff who provide accommodations are supported by effective systems and processes.

Introduction

Queen's University is committed to fostering an inclusive learning environment where all students have equitable access to education. Central to this commitment is the provision of academic accommodations for students with disabilities.

Providing academic accommodations is a complex and multifaceted process, requiring a careful balance between meeting diverse student needs and upholding essential academic requirements. Developing and implementing tailored accommodations requires significant time and coordination from faculty and staff, and these processes continue to evolve in response to changing legal, ethical, and technological contexts.

Recognizing the complexity of the academic accommodations processes and the need for continual improvement, the Office of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor commissioned an external review of the university's academic accommodations policy and procedures in 2023. Following consultations across campus during the 2023-24 academic year, Queen's received the [final external review report](#) in spring 2024.

As a first step in responding to the report, the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic) formed the Academic Accommodations Interim Working Group to investigate and propose solutions for the issues identified in Recommendation 9 in the report, which the external reviewers noted were the most pressing. The membership of the Academic Accommodations Interim Working Group is listed in Appendix A.

The working group, made up of faculty, staff, students, and senior leadership representatives, focused on understanding the issues and identifying practical recommendations, such as clarifying roles and responsibilities, simplifying processes, and assessing where resources may be needed. Their work was guided by the objective of ensuring students' accommodation needs were met and, where possible, simplifying processes for faculty and staff involved in coordinating academic accommodations.

Findings and Recommendations

Topic 1. Options to meet course requirements

Issue outlined in the external review report: Clarify who has the authority to determine the suitability of dropping, delaying, or reweighting assignments, and/or finding alternatives to meet essential course requirements.

1.1 Develop guidelines for essential learning requirements and intended learning outcomes

Guidelines should be developed to promote a shared understanding of essential learning requirements and intended learning outcomes. These definitions can provide pedagogical guidance to Queen's faculty and staff and help to support the academic accommodation process. The guidelines will be developed by the Special Advisor (Student Academic Accommodations and Considerations) in consultation with the Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning) and other members of the Queen's community. The working group recommends using the [University of Waterloo's definitions](#) as a guide.

1.2 Clearly outline the key steps and responsibilities in the accommodations process

The academic accommodation process, roles, and responsibilities for faculty, staff, and students should be clearly outlined and communicated, including the steps a faculty member should take if they have questions or concerns regarding the implementation of an accommodation in their course.

The working group agreed that Queen's Student Accessibility Services (QSAS) advisors are responsible for assigning accommodations that align with the functional limitations of the individual student. Instructors are then responsible for determining how the proposed academic accommodations can be implemented while still preserving the essential learning requirements of the course. If the instructor has questions or concerns regarding the implementation of the proposed academic accommodation, they should consult with QSAS. If a satisfactory solution cannot be found, the instructor should then discuss the matter with the appropriate Associate/Assistant Dean, in accordance with the dispute resolution process outlined below.

1.3 Develop a university-wide academic accommodations dispute resolution process

The majority of questions or concerns regarding the implementation of academic accommodations should be resolved informally through collaboration between the

student, QSAS, and the faculty member. In rare cases where a resolution cannot be reached, students and faculty members should have access to a clear and timely dispute resolution process.

After reviewing the proposed formal appeal process outlined in the external review report, the working group concluded that the suggested process was not suitable for implementation. In Ontario, the legal right to academic accommodations for students with disabilities is guaranteed by the Ontario Human Rights Code. The Appeal Panel proposed by the external reviewers, consisting of one faculty member, one student, and one academic accommodations expert, would have decision-making authority but would lack legal accountability, creating a disconnect between authority and responsibility. The working group agreed that for dispute resolution to be effective, final decisions must be made by a member of the university's leadership team, ensuring appropriate accountability and authority.

The working group recommends developing a dispute resolution process in which final decisions about academic accommodations are made by the Associate or Assistant Deans, in consultation with University Counsel, Queen's Student Accessibility Services (QSAS), and the Human Rights and Equity Office. Under the dispute resolution process for academic accommodations, decisions made by the Associate or Assistant Deans would not be appealable. Associate and Assistant Deans would have the appropriate authority, accountability, and understanding of the essential requirements of a course. The academic accommodation dispute resolution process should be added into the existing academic appeals processes in faculties and schools.

As part of this work, the working group recommends that academic accommodations be added to the list of items that are excluded from the definition of "academic decision" in section 10 of the Student Academic Appeals Policy.

Topic 2. Retroactive accommodations

Issue outlined in external review report: Clarify who should approve retroactive accommodations.

The working group confirmed that QSAS has the expertise and authority, guided by the Ontario Human Rights Code, to determine if a student requires a retroactive accommodation. Instructors are responsible for determining whether the proposed academic accommodation provided by QSAS can be implemented while still preserving the essential learning requirements of the course.

If the retroactive accommodation is for a completed course, the student should seek retroactive accommodation via a petition for academic remedy. Where possible, existing petition processes for academic accommodations in each faculty should be streamlined for students with retroactive accommodations.

Topic 3. 7-day extension accommodations

Issue outlined in the external review report: Address the misunderstanding and dissatisfaction with the 7-day extension accommodation and its interaction with the Self-Declaration of a Brief Absence.

3.1 Conduct a review and evidence summary of extension accommodations

Members of the working group will undertake a formal scoping review to identify best practices for extension accommodations across the sector and evaluate if there are certain disabilities where time extensions may be contraindicated.

The review will consider the issue from a range of perspectives, including medical, mental health, as well as a critical disability model. The review will be completed by fall 2025.

3.2 Simplify the extension request process

The current process to request extensions is time-intensive for faculty, staff, and students. Options should be explored to streamline the extension request process. The possibility of integrating the request processes into Ventus to reduce email-based workflows should be considered.

Topic 4. Responsibility beyond course instructors

Issue outlined in the external review report: Define under what circumstances the implementation of accommodations extends beyond the sole responsibility of a

course instructor, such as the provision of technology and support to provide virtual or hybrid classes, labs, or fieldwork, and the subsequent procedure to provide approved accommodation.

4.1 Instructor responsibilities should focus on tasks that require their expertise and knowledge of course content

Where possible, instructor responsibilities in the academic accommodations process should focus on the tasks that require their expertise and knowledge of the course content, such as the recreation of assessments for deferred exams. Administrative tasks that do not require subject-matter expertise, such as proctoring exams, room bookings, and the provision of technology should be delegated to trained support staff whenever possible. This approach ensures that instructors can prioritize teaching and assessment while non-academic logistics are efficiently managed by administrative support staff.

4.2 Resources should be provided for administrative tasks related to academic accommodations

Where possible, the university should have staff resources to assist with the administrative tasks related to academic accommodations. The individuals in these roles should receive the appropriate training and develop a deep understanding of university-wide and faculty-specific academic accommodations processes. They should serve as an informed first point of contact to assist faculty members and TAs in managing the non-academic aspects of academic accommodations, such as re-scheduling assessments, coordinating technology support, and booking rooms for deferred assessments.

4.3 Refine TA and Academic Assistant accessibility training

The existing accessibility training provided to TAs and Academic Assistants from the Human Rights and Equity Office should be refined to enhance their understanding of academic accommodations and accessibility in the classroom.

4.4 Ensure instructors have support available beyond the end of term

The duration of TA and Academic Assistant contracts is often limited to the start and end date of a course. Faculties and departments should consider extending a select number of TA contracts beyond the course end date so that instructors have continued support for academic accommodations that extend beyond the term.

4.5 Faculties and schools are encouraged to establish thresholds for additional instructor support

Faculties and schools are encouraged to establish clear thresholds for when additional support (e.g., TAs, graders, or administrative staff) is required for courses with a high volume of accommodations or particularly complex accommodations. Identifying the point at which academic accommodations exceed a manageable workload will help enable the university to provide timely and appropriate support for instructors. To support this work, faculties and schools are encouraged to consider refining their workloads agreements to more accurately reflect instructor workload.

Topic 5. Confidentiality and intellectual property

Issue outlined in external review report: Explore possible or perceived violations of confidentiality and intellectual property through the use of technology such as GLEAN or NoteQ and approved alternatives.

5.1 Strike a working group to assess the tools available to assist students who have accommodations to audio record lectures

The working group agreed that they believe the university has taken reasonable measures to review the security features of Glean (recently re-branded as Genio) and NoteQ and are satisfied that the tools provide adequate protections to maintain confidentiality and safeguard intellectual property. However, the working group determined that as Glean has been the default lecture recording tool at Queen's for over four years, it is an appropriate time to conduct an assessment to ensure it is still the best tool to meet the needs of students and instructors.

The university should establish a time-limited working group to assess the tools available to assist students who have an accommodation to audio record lectures, taking into account the needs of students with accommodations, security and privacy, and intellectual property, among other factors. The working group should recommend which of the available tools should be designated as the default, university-approved option for students with accommodations who need to audio record lectures. The working group should take into account the guidelines for the adoption of pan-institutional educational technologies referenced below.

Pending the outcome of the review, it is recommended that Glean remain the default university-approved tool for students with accommodations to audio record lectures.

5.2 Develop guidelines for the adoption of pan-institutional educational technologies

The Office of the Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning) will lead the development of guidelines on the adoption and roll out of pan-institutional educational technologies. The guidelines will include a requirement to consult with faculty, staff and students, and will incorporate existing processes, such as the ITS security assessment, to support effective planning and successful adoption of new technologies.

5.3 Finalize the Policy on Students Recording Academic Activities

The Office of the Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning) will work to finalize the Policy on Students Recording Academic Activities.

5.4 Implement a syllabus statement regarding class session recording

In alignment with the draft *Policy on Students Recording Academic Activities*, instructors should be asked to include a syllabus statement that indicates “there may be students in the class who have permission from the university to record class sessions for an approved academic purpose”. Instructors should also be asked to verbally inform students on their first day of the course, as well as any Elders, guest lecturers, and visiting professors.

Next Steps and Implementation

To support the university's ongoing commitment to academic accessibility, the Provost will appoint a Special Advisor (Student Academic Accommodations and Considerations) to oversee the implementation of the recommendations outlined in this report.

The Special Advisor will also be responsible for advancing broader academic accessibility efforts across the university. Reporting to the Provost and working closely with the Vice-Principal (Culture, Equity and Inclusion), the Vice-Provost and Dean of Student Affairs, and students, faculty, and staff, the Special Advisor will play an important role in clarifying critical aspects of academic accommodations processes and identifying sound practices and initiatives that can be implemented across the university.

Through this work, the Special Advisor will help to advance the university's commitment to equity, accessibility, and student success, while also working to ensure faculty and staff who provide accommodations are supported with effective systems and processes.

Appendix A: Membership of the Academic Accommodations Interim Working Group

- Niki Boytchuk-Hale, Queen's Rector
- Catherine Donnelly, Associate Professor, School of Rehabilitation Therapy, and Director, Health Services and Policy Research Institute
- Matthew Evans, Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic) and Chair
- Brian Frank, Professor, Smith Engineering, and Smith Engineering Faculty Senator
- Cynthia Gibney, Executive Director, Student Wellness Services
- Cathy Keates, Assistant Dean, Student Affairs
- Lon Knox, General Counsel
- Carlyn McQueen, Communications and Project Manager, Office of the Provost (Academic) and Committee Secretary
- Heidi Penning, Associate Director, Equity and Accessibility Services
- Jacob Reesor, Student Representative, School of Religion
- Stephanie Simpson, Vice-Principal (Culture, Equity, and Inclusion)
- Jenn Stephenson, Associate Dean (Academic), Faculty of Arts and Science
- Gavan Watson, Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning)