



University of King's College 2024 Accessibility Survey Report

MESSAGE FROM UKC ACCESSIBILITY OFFICER MICHELLE MAHONEY

Since I joined the University of King's College in January 2023, it has been rewarding to see the progress we have made in improving accessibility, such as upgrades to the built environment - removing high thresholds, securing floor mats, and changing doorknobs to lever style, among others.

Now, I am excited to share the results of our first Accessibility Survey of students, faculty, and staff, which were conducted in November 2023. Responses to this first survey were modest: we heard from 28 members of staff; 10 faculty; and 48 students. The responses nevertheless have highlighted certain key areas where we can improve and provide us with helpful insights for figuring out next steps. The process of sharing and promoting this survey will also be used to inform a plan to generate stronger engagement with a follow-up survey, which is planned for fall of 2024.

In 2017, Nova Scotia became the third province in Canada to pass accessibility legislation. The [Nova Scotia Accessibility Act](#) ("the Act") aims to demonstrate a commitment to a more equitable and barrier-free province for all Nova Scotians. The Act recognizes accessibility as a human right and sets a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030.

Included in the Act is a requirement for all post-secondary institutions to develop and make publicly available an accessibility plan that addresses focus areas, in addition to providing information about how the post-secondary institution will:

- identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility
- assess how proposed policies, programs, practices, and services will impact accessibility
- assess how proposed enactments or by-laws will impact accessibility

An important component of developing King's Accessibility Plan is ensuring that individuals from our university community have an opportunity to contribute to developing our plan. We'll be conducting another survey in Fall 2024 to keep track of our progress. Thanks to everyone for their contributions to making King's more accessible for all.

Kindly,

Michelle Mahoney (she/her)

Accessibility Officer | Office of the President

UKC ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The University of King's College (UKC) is committed to creating a campus community that is safe and accessible for all members and guests. In 2022, UKC rolled out its first comprehensive Accessibility Plan (an update to this plan is in development and planned for publication in early 2025), which was developed to fulfil the obligations the King's community shares with all Nova Scotia universities and public institutions—that is, to have an accessibility plan in fulfilment of the requirements of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act.

Successful learning, living, and employment are the result of a shared responsibility and commitment on the part of students, employees, faculty, and senior administrators. As UKC continues to enhance its culture of inclusiveness, it will require the support of everyone on campus to ensure the removal of barriers to accessibility.

UKC ACCESSIBILITY SURVEYS

In the fall of 2023, UKC Accessibility Officer Michelle Mahoney conducted a comprehensive survey of students, faculty, and staff to learn more about their accessibility needs, as well as the barriers to achieving them.

The surveys are an important resource because accessibility is something that affects everyone's experience at King's. If you've ever requested accommodations for your classes or residence, or used an elevator or stairs on campus, you've interacted with accessibility technologies.

This report summarizes some of the key results from the survey questions that aim to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to persons with disabilities so that our faculty, staff, students, parents, alumnae, and members of the broader community can access the university's goods and services, facilities, and premises in a way that ensures inclusion, dignity, and independence.

WHAT IS A DISABILITY?

Before we turn to the surveys, it's important to define both what a disability is and some of the barriers individuals living with a disability face. According to the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act, “a disability includes a physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual’s full and effective participation in society.”

Barriers to accessibility must be recognised as systemic and historical in nature rather than regarded in isolation as individual problems to be eliminated one by one. We understand “disability” not as a characteristic that belongs to an individual or an individual’s body, but as a function of social relations and attitudes that impact them in a negative way. As barriers will change, so too will accessibility needs.

TYPES OF BARRIERS

A barrier is anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities, including:

1. a physical barrier
2. an architectural barrier
3. an information or communications barrier
4. an attitudinal barrier
5. a technological barrier
6. a policy or a practice
7. a socio-economic barrier

AREAS OF COMMITMENT

Consistent with the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Framework 2020, the UKC Accessibility Plan commits the University to improving accessibility in the following six areas:

- Teaching, Learning, and Research
- Information and Communications
- Delivery of Goods and Services
- Employment
- Transportation
- Built Environment

Each area of commitment includes processes regarding implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

SURVEY SUMMARIES

While there were some common themes in all three survey cohorts of students, faculty, and staff, there were also unique points. Perhaps most notable was the percentage of each cohort who identified as having a disability. Those disabilities ranged from mental (such as emotional, psychological or psychiatric conditions), to a learning disability, a physical disability, a sensory disability, or a chronic autoimmune disorder.

Below, we'll highlight some of the key points from each UKC survey cohort. The respondents were honest in their assessments of what they feel we are doing well, as well as what they would like us to improve upon. (Please note that the survey response rate was not always 100%.)

STUDENT SURVEYS

A total of 59 students responded to the survey. They did not however choose to answer every question.

Fifty-five of them responded to the question "Do you consider yourself to be a person with a disability?":

Yes (61.82%)

No (34.55%)

Prefer not to respond (3.64%)

Thirty-seven students (46.15%) responded further that their disability was mental (such as emotional, psychological, or psychiatric conditions), 33.85% said their disability was intellectual or learning, 12.31% indicated their disability is physical, and 4.62% said their disability was sensory (such as blindness/visual impairments or deafness/hearing impairment).

Students were asked if they had disclosed their required academic accommodations while studying at King's. Fifty-one students responded:

Yes, to the course instructor (29.23%)

Yes, to a counselor/advisor (27.69%)

No, I didn't need to (27.69%)

No, I didn't want to (4.62%)

I haven't sought accommodations yet (1.54%)

I don't have accommodations (1.54%)

I never really considered doing it, and I don't really know how (1.54%)

No, but I have requested accommodations for mental health (1.54%)

N/A (1.54%)

Fifty students responded and 88% of respondents Agreed, Strongly Agreed, or Somewhat Agreed that most of their instructors create an inclusive, responsive, and accessible learning environment in their classes, while only 2% disagreed (6% didn't know and 4% ticked Not Applicable).

Almost half of student respondents agreed that their accessibility requirements are respected by both instructors and other students. However, more disagreed than agreed that it was easy to navigate the process to secure their required accommodations.

When it comes to student employment, 20 students responded and 90% of those said "No" when asked if they have faced discrimination in the course of their employment, while 10% preferred not to respond. For those who have faced discrimination, 21 students responded and 80.95% felt there are supports at King's to address it (4.76% responded No).

More than 70% of the 50 students who responded felt that the physical classrooms are accessible to them as learners, while only 6% Disagreed or 4% Strongly Disagreed. Potential barriers in the

built environment include building entrances and doors, washrooms/showers/change rooms, classrooms and auditoriums, signage, lighting and acoustics in classrooms, elevators, residence bedrooms, dining hall, recreational facilities, reception desks and counters, and interior stairs and ramps.

When students were asked what some of the main barriers were for accessing services, the replies ranged from long wait times to inadequate mental health services. Here are some examples:

- *I just usually don't know where to start with services, but doesn't feel like a barrier per se.*
- *Backlog, and no answers.*

Sampling of student comments:

- *My relationships with my profs have all been great. They are always understanding and support me when I am struggling.*
- *I believe in the importance of hiring an Accessibility Officer who actually requires accessibility accommodations. It's good to see that King's values the opinions of persons with disabilities at an executive level.*
- *The seating options in many of the classrooms are horrendous for my back and neck.*
- *A certain degree of confusion about how to access accommodations and how this differs at King's vs. Dal.*

FACULTY SURVEYS

A total of 10 faculty responded to the survey. They did not however choose to answer every question.

When responding to the question (all ten-faculty responded) "Do you consider yourself to be a person with a disability?" the results were as follows:

Yes (30%)

No (70%)

Of those who responded Yes, 33.33% indicated their disability is physical, 33.33% said their disability was sensory (such as blindness/visual impairments or deafness/hearing impairment), 16.67% said their disability was intellectual or learning, and 16.67% said their disability was mental (such as emotional, psychological, or psychiatric conditions)

When responding to the question (all ten-faculty responded) “Have you personally needed accommodations?” the results were as follows:

Yes (30%)

No (70%)

70% of respondents Strongly Agree that they are aware that students with disabilities are enrolled within their academic program or department. They also recognize myriad barriers to accessibility in teaching and learning, including:

- doors and windows that are difficult to open
- difficulties hearing and seeing presentations in large classrooms
- classroom limitations, including seating
- little chairs with tables preventing left-handed students or students with different body types to sit/write comfortably
- difficulties accessing accommodations services for students, applying them to Brightspace and other learning environments
- difficulties using residences, accessing food services

In order to make teaching and learning more accessible, these are some of the supports faculty feels are required:

- better video and audio technology for all classrooms
- better access to space for students with physical disabilities, both residences and learning facilities
- an ability to rearrange classroom furniture to accommodate students or different (non-Western) ways of teaching and learning
- meetings between faculty, King’s Accessibility Office, and Facilities to discuss classroom needs

55.55% of respondents consider their faculty/department to have a culture of inclusivity and accessibility. A combined 90% of respondents Strongly Agree, Agree, or Somewhat Agree that they understand the process for students to seek accommodations on campus. But when asked if they have confidence in the process to seek those accommodations, 70% Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

An overwhelming 100% indicated that they are aware of physical and architectural barriers at King's, while 50% responded that they have experienced physical and architectural barriers themselves.

While 40% of respondents Agree that disclosing disability is best delayed until after tenure is granted, 40% indicated Not Applicable and a further 20% reported that they didn't know.

40% of respondents Strongly Agree that reappointment, tenure, and promotion committees need training on how to access applicants with disabilities, while 20% Agreed and 40% answered Not Applicable.

Sampling of faculty comments:

- *I don't feel I have enough time to make my class material more accessible.*
- *Students with physical disabilities are much less common than students who seek accommodations for deadlines, etc., due to professed mental health, etc., reasons.*
- *Better video and audio technology are needed for all classrooms. Better access to all spaces for students with physical disabilities are needed.*
- *The acoustics of the buildings and classrooms are terrible, and I'd like to see that improved.*

STAFF SURVEYS

A total of 28 staff responded to the survey. When responding to the question "Do you consider yourself to be a person with a disability?" the results were as follows:

Yes (39.29%)

No (60.71%)

Of 11 staff who responded Yes, 40% indicated their disability is physical, 33.33% said their disability was intellectual or learning, and 26.67% said their disability was mental (such as emotional, psychological, or psychiatric conditions).

When responding to the question “Have you ever contacted Human Resources regarding accessibility, medical leave, disability or accommodation?” all 28 staff members responded, and the results were as follows:

Yes (32.14%)

No (60.71%)

Prefer Not to Respond (7.14%)

When asked whether staff is aware that King’s must provide accommodations to the point of undue hardship, all 28 staff members responded: 71.43% said Yes, while 28.57% said No. As to whether or not they understand how to access accommodations, 39.29% said Agree, 14.29% said Strongly Agree, 7.14% said Disagree, 3.57% said Strongly Disagree, and 3.57% said Not Applicable.

All 28 staff responded to this question and an overwhelming 85.71% of respondents believes their program/department has a culture of inclusivity and accessibility: 35.71% Somewhat Agree, 28.57% Agree, and 21.43% Strongly Agree.

Over the past five years, 57.14% of respondents said Yes when asked if they have sought sources of information or support for themselves or a colleague’s accessibility needs. However, when asked if they found the process of accessing accommodations clear and easy, only 3.57% marked Agree and the same percentage marked Strongly Agree (50% said Not Applicable, 17.86% said Somewhat Agree, and 7.14% said I Don’t Know).

When asked whether they are aware of physical and architectural barriers at King’s, 27 Staff members responded: 88.89% responded Yes, 3.70% said No, and 7.41% said I Don’t Know. To the follow-up question “Have you experienced physical and architectural barriers at King’s” the response was 59.26% No and 40.74% Yes.

Sampling of staff comments:

- *We need adequate signage outside for accessible entrances to all campus buildings. It's not immediately obvious where the accessible entrances are to the A&A building and many of the communal spaces on campus.*
- *Proper signage for all buildings, including residence buildings and the gym. I am always stopped by someone in the parking lot asking for directions to a building, especially the gym.*
- *More accessible parking spaces.*
- *The roads on campus are confusing and nobody knows how to navigate them. The entrance is used as an exit and often people are nearly hit when walking through the actual vehicle entrance.*

LOOKING AHEAD

Although the response rates were very low for the survey, it was the first one on Accessibility at King's. I hope to repeat the survey in the Fall of 2024 with more favorable responses. Stay tuned for a new Accessibility Survey coming out in November 2024.

The 2022 King's Accessibility Plan is a living document that will be subject to repeated "course correction," based on new findings such as these survey results, new initiatives, and the provincial standards for all areas of commitment.

As a prescribed public sector body (PPSB) we are required to update our accessibility plan every three years and make it publicly available (Accessibility Act s.42). Our accessibility plan must be updated and made publicly available no later than April 1, 2025.

Our first accessibility plan is a strong foundation for updating our plan. As we continue to build momentum towards achieving accessibility goals identified in our first plan, this is an opportunity to review and revise commitments to make sure they are relevant, realistic and achievable for the next three years. We are not required to develop new commitments if this is not realistic based on the status of our first plan.

Accessibility is core to the King's mission, and the success of the King's Accessibility Plan requires strong and focused leadership, the enduring commitment of individuals and of King's programs and offices, and robust processes of accountability, consultation, and collaboration. The goal is to advance our understanding of what makes a truly accessible organization, and to transform that knowledge into a culture that builds accessibility into everything we do.

Thank you to all who participated in the survey.