



UNIVERSITY  
of GUELPH

IMPROVE LIFE.

# University of Guelph's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2022-2024

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## Statement from Indira Naidoo-Harris, Associate Vice-President, Diversity & Human Rights

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Making education inclusive and accessible is a key pillar of excellence at the University of Guelph. The last two years and the COVID-19 pandemic provided Canadian universities with not only unprecedented challenges, but unique opportunities to explore ways in which we can expand equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility efforts to *Improve Life* for our community. It served as a reminder that identifying and addressing barriers to full participation within our institution is an ongoing and evolving commitment that requires continuous assessment and action.

U of G's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan for 2022-2024 captures key initiatives and strategies to not only comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, but to fulfil our University's commitment to building learning, working, and living environments where every member of our community experiences an authentic sense of belonging.

This plan outlines important steps U of G has taken towards the goals set in the 2016-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan while also identifying areas for future improvement and growth. It proposes new and innovative best practices and highlights, many key and groundbreaking initiatives developed over the past five years and how they will aid in addressing accessibility at U of G.

The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan serves as a roadmap, outlining best practices and priorities to foster equitable access to lifelong learning. This document intends to support the work of those improving accessibility at U of G and provides benchmarks for success in achieving institution-wide accessibility goals.

Embedding accessibility best practices in our policies, practices, and planning is a key component to U of G's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion on our campuses. As we look to the future, we will continue to identify and address barriers to full participation and success so everyone can reach their full potential.



## Accessibility at the University of Guelph

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The University of Guelph is an internationally recognized, comprehensive public university. With close to 30,000 students, more than 800 faculty and more than 1,800 research projects, the University is ranked number 1 in student satisfaction, number 1 in research dollars and number 4 in Maclean's "University Rankings 2021" in the *Comprehensive* category. Yet what the numbers don't capture is how we live while we're here and after we leave.

The University of Guelph, is committed to fostering an educational, working, and living environment, where all University community members experience an authentic sense of inclusion and belonging. We are passionate about educating the whole person to shape better

citizens of the world. Everyone who studies here, explores here, teaches here, and works here, is committed to one simple purpose: ***To Improve Life.***

The University of Guelph has a long-standing commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion on our campuses, which is outlined in the 2016 strategic framework, [Our Path Forward](#). A key pillar of this framework is a dedication to *Nurture our Distinctive Culture* by working together openly, respectfully, and inclusively. Our goal is to be a leader in inclusivity.

Establishing a culture of inclusion is only possible if an institution continually learns, designs, reviews, and rebuilds structures to be equitable, and accessible to all. With that in mind, the University of Guelph is working to make accessibility a priority in our services, products, and facilities – for students, staff, faculty, and visitors – in a way that respects the dignity and independence of all persons with disabilities.

The University recognizes that accessibility requires an anti-ableism approach to decision-making. This involves an understanding and examination of the systemic, physical, and institutional barriers that persons with both physical and mental disabilities experience during their interactions across the University. This requires the involvement of and empowerment of

diverse stakeholders, including various equity-deserving groups with a focus on persons with disabilities, to drive a strategic and system-wide approach to accessibility. The University's approach recognizes the importance of intersectionality and fairness when creating and reviewing plans that work for all individuals within the U of G community.

## The Legislation

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The University of Guelph has obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, also known by its acronym AODA, to ensure that the University is an inclusive and accessible place to work, study and visit. These obligations include meeting the **5 (five)** accessibility standards outlined in the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, also known by its acronym IASR. These five standards are:

1. One - Information & Communications Standards
2. Two - Employment Standards
3. Three - Design of Public Spaces Standards
4. Four - Customer Services Standards
5. Five - Transportation Standards

In addition to the standards, the U of G is required to have a written multi-year accessibility plan updated at least once every 5 years, posted to our website, outlining the University's strategy to prevent and remove accessibility barriers. This is our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, or simply our MYAP.

## Recent Accomplishments

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The University of Guelph has focused much work over the years to making accessibility a priority in our services, products, and facilities. These efforts involved the participation of various departments, stakeholders, and individuals, including equity-deserving groups, to drive a strategic and system-wide approach to accessibility. Some of the more recent initiatives at the University are listed below.

### *Launch of the Digital Accessibility Resource Centre*

Providing accessibility support for the creation of digital content has been a challenge for content creators at the U of G. To fill this gap, [The Digital Accessibility Resource Centre \(DARC\)](#), also known by its acronym D.A.R.C., was created. In 2018, the University was excited to announce the opening of the D.A.R.C.: an incredible new resource, made up of accessibility experts, providing reliable multi-media accessibility support to members of the U of G community. The team offers support in a variety of ways – including in-person and email consultations, weekly office hours, and regular training sessions on topics such as Word and PDF accessibility. By ensuring digital content is accessible for everyone, the work of the D.A.R.C. is instrumental in improving life on campus and fostering a culture of inclusion.

### *Communications*

With a view to making our policies and accessibility information easier to locate for staff, students, faculty and visitors, the Office of Diversity and Human Rights, also known by its acronym DHR – with assistance from the Accessibility Steering Committee – has reorganized and centralized key accessibility information and resources. These recent changes are a few of the steps we have taken to improve communications:

- Centralizing the [Statement of Commitment to Accessibility on the DHR website](#). This is just one of multiple Statements of Commitment that users can now find more easily.
- Centralizing the [Accessible Customer Services Policy](#) on the DHR website.



- [Creating a new accessibility landing page](#) when users click on the “accessibility” link or icon at the bottom of every main U of G webpage. This new landing page provides users with information on the University’s commitment to accessibility, accessibility resources across units and departments, and accessibility policies. Contact information for questions regarding accessibility, or suggestions to improve the page or request alternate formats, are also included. As part of our 2022-2024 MYAP, U of G will continue to ensure this feature functions well as we transition over to new website structures.

### *Accessible Teaching and Learning during COVID-19*

The University and the community have had to navigate unprecedented challenges, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This challenging situation has forced students, faculty, and staff to adapt to rapidly changing learning, working, and living environments. In 2020-2021, an equity, diversity, and inclusion working group, in collaboration with Student Accessibility Services, also known by its acronym SAS, created [an accessibility document to help guide academic decision-making during COVID-19](#). The document outlined various themes that focused on inclusion and accessibility - such as Accessible Teaching and Learning, Resources for Students, Communications and Physical Distancing - that reflected distinct needs, issues, and solutions.

### *2021 Accessibility Conference*

In May 2021, Open Learning and Educational Support (or simply Open Ed) hosted the *2021 Annual Accessibility Conference*. The 12<sup>th</sup> annual conference welcomed accessibility novices and experts to build communities and share ideas. The conference presenters shared practical and theoretical knowledge of topics such as: web, document and multimedia accessibility and AODA-related topics; disability research and accommodation; inclusive design; adaptive technology; and leadership in the field of accessibility. Open Ed is already planning for the 2022 conference.

### *Physical Environment – BlindSquare*

In 2018, U of G became the first Canadian post-secondary institution to install a three-level electronic wayfinding system called *BlindSquare*. This system helps people who are blind or have visual impairment or those with special cognitive issues find their way around campus, both inside and outside. The mobile app with audio voicing helps people navigate campus through a system of GPS, beacons for navigation, and QR codes for detailed information. A groundbreaking update is also underway. Electric vehicles, being very quiet, are a potential issue for people who are blind or have visual impairment. A new initiative, requested by students, is to equip all physical resource utility vehicles with technology to communicate with the app and allow for audible warnings when the vehicles are parked.

### **The U of G's 2022-2024 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and Progress Update**

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The rest of this document is separated into two Sections. The first section is the University's accessibility plan for 2022-2024. It outlines both the goals of the institution to meet its legislative requirements as well as the key deliverables required to remove and prevent barriers to accessibility on our campuses. It is informed by input from the Accessibility Steering Committee as well as multiple units across campus. A second section highlights progress from the previous Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (2016-2021).

### **Section One: Our Actions! Multi-Year Accessibility Plan: 2022-2024**

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Being a leader does not mean waiting to be required by legislation to identify and remove barriers. There is always work to do when it comes to fostering a sense of belonging for our staff, students, faculty, and visitors on campus. We are pleased that this year's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, or MYAP, puts in place goals that not only help us prepare for possible new laws but are also priorities simply because they are best practices, align with our commitment to accessibility, and are informed by continual learning.



At present, there are no new levels of compliance phasing noted in the AODA or IASR. However, as part of its planning for 2022-2024, the University of Guelph is aware of and has considered two ongoing legislative developments. It is anticipated that the 2022-2024 MYAP will need to be revisited and updated given these developments. These developments offer an opportunity to leverage accessibility best practices, ideas, and topic issues that have been identified by government committees and begin a process of assessing existing strengths and opportunities in student accessibility, so that we are well positioned to meet any new standard.

#### *Employment Standard and Information and Communication Standard Reviews*

The AODA requires a review of the accessibility standards every five (5) years. Changes to the standards come by way of committee that will review and alter a standard. Both the Employment Standard and the Information and Communication Standard recently underwent a review process. The recommendations from the review committees are publicly posted. While the Ministry has not indicated how they will respond to the recommendations to modify the standards, the University anticipates that some changes may flow from these recommendations.

- The Accessibility & Equity Officer, along with the Accessibility Steering Committee, will devise a framework for reviewing the two sets of recommendations and determining any recommended updates to the U of G's 2022-2024 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.
- The Accessibility & Equity Officer, along with the Accessibility Steering Committee, will continue to monitor the status of these recommendations.
- Update the 2022-2024 MYAP as necessary.

#### *Proposed Post-Secondary Education Standard*

In 2017, the Minister Responsible for Accessibility established a Development Committee to develop recommendations for a proposed accessibility standard to address barriers in post-secondary education. This Committee has (as of 2021) developed a draft set of recommendations (referred to as the PSE Recommendations). While these are just recommendations, and there is

currently no certainty as to the finalization and coming into force of new obligations, the report and recommendations provide a window into possible law that may be coming to Universities and Colleges in the next few years. Even if the laws do not materialize, the University of Guelph recognizes that being a leader in accessibility means being proactive and identifying opportunities to remove barriers and create an authentic sense of belonging for all students. To that end, the following steps will be taken.

- Diversity and Human Rights (or simply DHR) and the Accessibility Steering Committee will continue to monitor the status of the PSE Recommendations.
- DHR and the Accessibility Steering Committee will use the PSE Recommendations to identify areas where the University will be affected. More specifically, DHR and the Accessibility Steering Committee will:
  - Collectively review the PSE Recommendations and review collective feedback from other post-secondary institutions.
  - Develop an accessibility resourcing/capacity building strategy. Elements of this strategy will include identifying resources such as accessibility champions; identifying and forming networks beyond those already involved with the Accessibility Steering Committee; identifying new pathways to build awareness of accessibility issues; identifying opportunities to build accessibility into academic planning; and identifying opportunities to communicate accessibility at the University.
  - Begin development of an institutional accessibility communication strategy, in consultation with senior leadership. This will involve reviewing existing policies, practices and procedures that are related to accessibility communications across the U of G's campuses. The goal is to deliver a finalized accessibility communication strategy either in 2023 or 2024 that can be reviewed on an annual basis. Elements of this strategy should include emphasizing responsibilities across campuses under the *AODA* and the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and a statement of principles on accessible and inclusive pedagogy.
  - Develop a consultation plan for engaging groups and individuals, including persons with disabilities, in strategies or other action items.

- Prioritize any additional action items based on the review of the PSE Recommendations and barrier areas of academic accessibility.
- Continue to monitor the status of the PSE Recommendations and update the 2022-2024 MYAP with any new deliverables identified by the Accessibility Steering Committee.

In addition to the above, the University has identified the following initiatives to ensure ongoing compliance with accessibility legislation and to situate accessibility as an institutional imperative:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Deliverable</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>
Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make all new digital assets accessible going forward</li> <li>• Monitor to maintain ongoing accessibility</li> <li>• Improve the accessibility of the backlog of existing digital assets over time</li> <li>• Proactively address future compliance requirements</li> </ul>	Responsibility: Computing & Communications Services (or simply CCS), others
Ongoing	Exterior stairs repair program to replace aged stairs with new stairs that incorporate accessibility features	Responsibility: Physical Resources
2022	Supplement the new Diversity and Human Rights (or simply DHR) landing page, or create a new document, to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify all key campus contacts and support services for the creation of accessible documents</li> <li>• reorganize information on how to make and respond to requests for alternative formats.</li> </ul>	Responsibility: DHR, Accessibility Steering Committee
2022	Accessibility Steering Committee membership review and networking review to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance input and consultation between persons with disabilities and the Accessibility Steering Committee</li> </ul>	Responsibility: DHR, Accessibility Steering Committee

Date	Deliverable	Responsibility
2022	Continue to work with digital accessibility tool vendors, in particular those with testing, auditing, and reporting tools, with a focus on websites and online courses in the learning management system.	Responsibility: CCS, Open Ed
2022 →	Continue to work with external consultants to proactively address PSE recommendations with a specific focus on training.	Responsibility: DHR, Human Resources, Open Ed, CCS, others
2022	<p>Library entrance and courtyard renovation. This project will enhance accessibility for library users by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing the number of power doors</li> <li>• Incorporating inclusivity into the design of the main entrance</li> <li>• Leveling the external pathway between buildings</li> <li>• Installing new exterior tables with accessibility seating allowing for wheelchair access</li> <li>• Creating a new accessibility service point for IT Help</li> </ul>	Responsibility: Library Facilities
2022	Complete hiring process for library digital accessibility coordinator. This position will: deliver training to library staff about accessible documents, multimedia, and web content, including AODA standards and WCAG 2.0 Level AA; provide guidance and leadership about best practices in the creation of accessible content.	Responsibility: Library
2023	Review and as necessary update or create any training modules, including equity, diversity and inclusion modules, to recognize disability as a critical aspect of the institution's commitment to EDI.	Responsibility: DHR
2023	Create a guidance document resource and or training for staff and faculty on how to incorporate an intersectional accessibility lens into the creation of policies, procedures, or guidelines.	Responsibility: DHR



<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Deliverable</u></b>	<b><u>Responsibility</u></b>
2022-2024	Continue to work with campus partners to create a Community of Practice focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (also known by its acronym STEM) accessibility, with representation from campus academic and non-academic units.	Responsibility: DHR, Accessibility Steering Committee, others
2022-2024	Finalize an accessibility policy for the provision of internally published textbooks and supplementary learning resources in alternative formats upon request.	Responsibility: DHR, Accessibility Steering Committee, others

## Section two: Progress Updates from 2016-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

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The University of Guelph is pleased to report that many of its previous accessibility goals have been met. The University also recognizes that some goals require ongoing work, and there are important deliverables to finalize. Any 2016-2021 goals that are in progress have been incorporated into the 2022-2024 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, above.

The 2016-2021 goals have been grouped into several categories:

- Digital Accessibility Related Goals
- Library and Procurement Goals

### *Digital Accessibility Related Goals*

#### **Goal: Develop a U of G policy or best practice on document accessibility**

Status: Complete.

The U of G created and launched the [Digital Accessibility Resource Centre](#), also known by its acronym D.A.R.C., which provides U of G digital content creators with education, tools, training, and support to ensure that their content is accessible for all. D.A.R.C. can assist creators in creating accessible web content, Word documents, presentation slides, videos, audio, and other multimedia.



### **Goal: Develop accessibility guides for academic units and departments**

Status: Complete with new deliverable.

Multiple new resources aimed at accessible education have been created. This includes Open Education's instructor guide on accessible education, which provides resources for incorporating Universal Instructional Design and Universal Design for Learning frameworks into the design of courses. Additional tip sheets on topics such as Developing Courses, Writing a Course Syllabus, Creating Accessible Lectures, Using PowerPoint, and Evaluation/Feedback have been created by the Office of Diversity and Human Rights. The D.A.R.C. has guides and tools to assist web content creators in creating AODA-compliant web resources that can be used by academic units and departments.

The Office of Diversity and Human Rights has developed a new landing page that provides users with information on the University's commitment to accessibility, resources across units and departments, accessibility policies, and contact information for the creation of accessible document and multi-media formats. This landing page will be supplemented, or a new document created, to identify all key campus contacts and support services for the creation of accessible documents and responding to requests for alternative formats.

### **Goal: Develop recommendations for improving the University's web-based instructional materials and training opportunities related to creating accessible documents and presentations.**

Status: Complete.

The Digital Accessibility Resource Centre, or D.A.R.C., is made up of accessibility experts who provide campus support for digital content creation. D.A.R.C. now provides U of G digital content creators with education, tools, training, and support to ensure that their content is accessible for all. D.A.R.C. can assist creators in creating accessible web content, Word documents, presentation slides, videos, audio and other multimedia.

### **Goal: Create an accessibility policy for the provision of internally published textbooks and supplementary learning resources in alternative formats upon request.**

Status: In Progress.

This policy would address such materials as handouts, course readers and lab manuals. While work continues to create this policy, [Library Accessibility Services](#) is working with [Student Accessibility Services](#), or simply SAS, to ensure that students registered with SAS can access AODA compliant electronic reserve materials as well as alternate format textbooks and supplementary reading services upon request. Library Accessibility Services has also been facilitating accessibility training and support for instructors creating open education resource (O.E.R) textbooks.

**Goal: Work with campus partners to create a Community of Practice focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (or simply STEM) accessibility, with representation from campus academic and non-academic units**

Status: In Progress.

Progress has been made, including tracking new tools, formats and platforms that generate or support accessible math content. Next steps will be to create a forum for sharing this work with campus math creators and instructors to raise awareness of accessible math issues. The Community of Practice should (1) Identify potential barriers to teaching and learning posed by STEM courses for students with perceptual disabilities; (2) continue to review current campus practices for the presentation of mathematical content in documents and on the Internet and research solutions for the accessible presentation of mathematical content that would be compatible with campus practices.

**Goal: January 2021 WCAG 2.0 Related Goals.**

These included: ensuring communication and continued support of web accessibility resources and tools for campus; development of a Web-Accessible document strategy; development of a Web-accessible audio/video strategy; ensuring communication and continued support of web accessibility resources and tools for campus; ensuring clear communications of deadlines and accountability; development of an education and training strategy for content providers and web-developers.

Status: Complete

The Digital Accessibility Resource Centre created and launched a virtual accessible content creation training course for staff called "Digital Accessibility - Removing Digital Accessibility Barriers" through Courselink. Decision-making charts were distributed to help website moderators evaluate their content and determine appropriate remediation steps. D.A.R.C.



generated and shared a reporting rubric for website moderators to attest compliance status in preparation for the 2021 AODA report.

### *Library and Procurement Goals*

#### **Goal: Provide accessible versions of library resources when asked and make printed learning materials accessible**

Status: Complete with new deliverable

The library has created a Print Resource Accessibility Policy that provides braille, e-text or MP3 formats of Library materials, or personal copies of books upon request by community members with perceptual disabilities. These materials are provided to community members at no additional charge. This policy will be replaced imminently with a broader accessibility policy also dealing with digital and multimedia materials in the collection. LAS ensures that students with perceptual disabilities have access to accessible learning materials in formats that meet their needs. The Library's E-Learning and Reserve Services has a process in place for ensuring that course learning materials posted to the e-reserve are AODA and copyright compliant at no charge to instructors.

#### **Goal: Incorporate accessibility into procurement**

Status: Ongoing

The Library Accessibility Working Group (or simply LAWG) continues to work with external libraries to ensure that licensing language used with vendors of electronic resources includes accessibility provisions. LAWG is working internally with campus partners to incorporate accessibility designs, criteria and features when procuring or acquiring both high cost and low-cost goods or services.

#### **Goal: Provide or procure accessible versions of digital or multimedia resources or materials in Library collections when requested**

Status: Complete with new deliverable

The Library has completed a policy for the provision of accessible digital or multimedia resources at no additional charge when requested by community members with perceptual disabilities. LAS also provides SAS-registered students with accessible

course media supports (e.g., captions, transcripts, audio description) upon request. The LAWG will continue working towards a finalized policy on accessible procurement and remediation of video and other formats.

### *Physical Space Goals*

The University of Guelph incorporates accessibility improvements in all its new and redevelopment projects. Whether constructing, redeveloping, or replacing exterior paths of travel, exterior access ramps, off-street parking facilities, waiting areas, or service counters (to name a few ongoing projects), the University meets and exceeds its accessibility requirements. Here are a few goals achieved by Physical Resources:

- Additional accessible picnic tables were dispatched across campus in Summer 2021.
- The University's Childcare Centre completed a significant playground renovation in 2019 which incorporated many accessibility features, such as sensory and active play components.
- The University is making progress on an exterior stairs repair program to replace aged stairs with new stairs that incorporate accessibility features.
- The University has installed either curb ramps or depressed curbs in all required locations, totaling more than 100 constructions since 2016.
- All pedestrian crossing signals on campus have both visual and audible components.
- Physical Resources conducts a twice-annual accessibility townhall, inviting the public to discuss accessibility issues pertaining to the campus-built environment.
- A recent audit of accessible parking spaces determined that the University exceeds the minimum number of required accessible spaces.

Physical Resources (PR) is responsible for the design, construction, and maintenance of the University's built environment. Improving accessibility of the built environment is at the forefront of what we do and a broader University commitment. On the design side front, Physical Resources is currently working with an Accessibility Consultant who is auditing all campus buildings for accessibility compliance against the Ontario Building Code, AODA, and City of Guelph's municipal guidelines. This multi-phased audit began in early 2023 and will be completed by mid-2024. All elements determined to be inaccessible will be logged and priority ranked in a database. This database will serve as one of PR's guiding principles for the design and

construction of all future projects on campus. It is in future renovation and construction projects where deficient elements can be corrected.

From our own inspections and feedback from the campus community in the form of emails and work orders, PR's Maintenance Operations stays ahead of the ongoing maintenance of accessibility elements. This includes such things as; ramp and walkway repairs to eliminate trip hazards, timely snow clearing to ensure campus navigability and door hardware adjustments to ensure power assisted powers are functioning properly.

## **Next Steps**

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Over the past few years, various departments at the University of Guelph have put key initiatives in place to increase accessibility for persons with disabilities. These measures have played a vital role in making accessibility a priority in our services, products, and facilities – for students, staff, faculty, and visitors.

This plan is an important step forward in the University of Guelph's strategy to create equitable and inclusive learning, working, and living environments on our campuses. While the various goals and initiatives outlined in our 2022-2024 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan will play an important role in equity, diversity, and inclusion work at U of G, there is more to do to make our efforts sustainable and successful.



With that in mind, the University of Guelph commits to working towards these goals in a focused and transparent way. Progress on the various initiatives outlined here will be carefully monitored, tracked, and updated to measure our commitment to accessibility.



