GCworkplace Consultation Series on Accessibility

PRELIMINARY REPORT – INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

LAST UPDATED ON: APRIL 7, 2021

DEPARTMENT: ACCOMMODATION MANAGEMENT AND WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS, REAL PROPERTY SERVICES, PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT CANADA

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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Introduction

The GCworkplace Consultation Series on Accessibility was created as part of the mandate of the Centre for GCworkplace Innovation, which is to foster knowledge transfer and innovation as well as develop new concepts and tools for the Government of Canada (GC) workplace in collaboration with GC departments, agencies, and external partners. It was also created following the GC's priority and commitment towards accessibility by partnering with key stakeholders.

The GCworkplace Consultation Series on Accessibility consists of a series of virtual workshops with persons with various types of disabilities (visible and invisible) to discuss and understand their needs in the workplace. A total of 14 sessions (seven in English and seven in French) were originally organized; due to high demand, additional sessions were added for certain disabilities. Through engagement and consultation with users of workplaces, each session addressed existing and emerging or potential workplace barriers for a specific type of disability including mobility issues, cognitive impairments, learning disabilities, environmental sensitivity, visual impairments, hearing impairments, and psychological and mental health.

One session attended by persons with intellectual disabilities—affecting the ability to learn and to adapt behaviour to different situations—was held on November 4, 2020 in English. A French session scheduled for October 28, 2020 was cancelled due to low registration.

Statistics

For intellectual disabilities session held on November 4, 2020.

# of participants	# of departments	# of regions
8	6	3
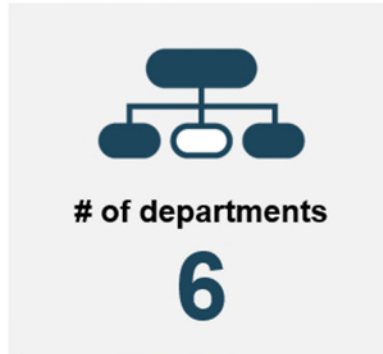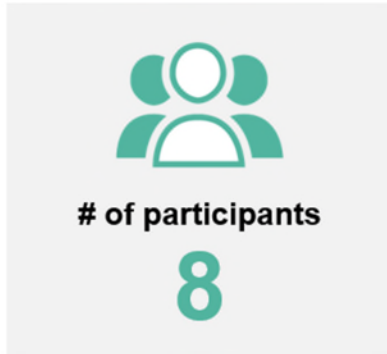
PARTICIPATING DEPARTMENTS

> Canada Revenue Agency
> Canadian Border Services Agency
> Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission
> Employment and Social Development Canada
> Public Service and Procurement Canada
> Service Canada

PARTICIPATING REGIONS AND CITIES

> **National Capital Area**
> **Western** (Edmonton)
> **Pacific** (Coquitlam, Vancouver)

Comments

Participants were asked to share their thoughts on their current workplace—what works, what doesn't—as well as to imagine their dream workplace. They were also walked through what a GCworkplace might look like and asked about potential barriers in specific parts of a workplace.

CURRENT WORKPLACES

"It takes a lot of energy not to be frustrated by constant interruptions at work"

CURRENT WORKPLACES

"There has to be a better way to accommodate that doesn't put a spotlight on the person with disabilities"

"I hate having my back to a room where people can come up behind me without any warning"

"There's still resistance from management when it comes to accommodations"

"There's so much noise that I can't concentrate on what's on my headphones, let alone on work itself"

When asked about their current workplaces, the main positive that many participants highlighted was the ability to work from home, although this wasn't an option that was available to everyone pre-pandemic, nor was it one that all participants wanted, as some participants preferred the separation of work and home that came with physically going to an office. Participants also liked workplaces with natural light, sit-stand desks, and closed rooms for personal conversations or phone calls.

When it came to what didn't work in their current workplaces, participants listed several common concerns.

The process for getting accommodations

The most common complaint was about obtaining accommodations. Participants noted that many managers were resistant to providing accommodations such as telework, a desk in a quiet area, or cubicles where the employee could face the door. Some participants noted that their requests for accommodations like telework were denied because their management claimed they constituted undue hardship for their work units, and multiple participants revealed that they had had to change jobs before being granted the accommodations they needed.

Lack of quiet places to work

Multiple participants mentioned that their workplaces had very few closed rooms or quiet areas, which made it difficult for them to be able to concentrate on their work. In some workplaces, the closed rooms were always booked, meaning they weren't a real option despite being presented as one by management. Many participants had noise-cancelling headphones as part of their accommodations, but they found that either the noise levels were so high that the headphones were ineffective or that they felt isolated from the rest of their team because they weren't able to hear what teammates were saying.

Feeling marginalized or excluded

Participants were also concerned with the way their accommodations made them feel excluded or isolated from their teams and from other employees. Noise-cancelling headphones made it difficult to hear colleagues or to join in social talk. Having high panels around their cubicles to help with anxiety or noise made participants feel singled out, as did having their own closed office when colleagues were in cubicles. Participants wanted more flexibility in accommodations so that they could still be accommodated without feeling marginalized or causing their teammates to feel like the employee was getting special treatment.

DREAM WORKPLACES

When asked about their vision for their dream workplaces, participants listed practical improvements that would make workplaces work for them.

Flexible work locations

Participants wanted the ability to choose whether to work from home or in the office—some participants strongly preferred working from home and wanted to be able to do it every day, while others wanted to go to the office to have defined boundaries between work and home. All participants emphasized that this choice should be up to them and not left to unpredictable or inconsistent managers.

Access to quiet spaces

Participants stressed the importance of having access to quiet focus spaces, such as reservable closed offices or closed areas, with minimal noise and distractions and the ability to sit facing the door to avoid being surprised from behind. Several participants mentioned that these spaces should be available to all employees, not just employees with disabilities, to avoid the

perception of special treatment. Participants also mentioned that a reflection room would be helpful for employees who need to take a mental break.

Ergonomic equipment in all work locations

Participants felt that ergonomic equipment—such as height-adjustable desks, dual monitors, and ergonomic chairs—should be accessible regardless of whether an employee was working in an office or at home. Multiple participants mentioned that they are suffering health-related repercussions because they do not have access to this equipment while working at home due to COVID-19.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

"The closed offices were right beside the main doors, so as you were trying to focus the doors would thump"

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

"I need document holders because I can't look down at documents without getting vertigo"

"Our flooring is carpet stuck directly to concrete so it's uncomfortable to stand at a desk"

"The doors are too heavy for me to physically open"

"There's glare on my computer every day and no way to block the light"

Participants were asked for feedback about barriers in different parts of the workplace, as well as what they would like to see instead in those places. Some common barriers were identified.

Workplace noise

The lack of quiet workpoints that allowed participants to focus was by far the most common barrier. Participants struggled to work through general workplace noise such as doors opening or closing, nearby conversations, and kitchen appliances beeping. Some participants had noise-cancelling headphones but were placed next to open air offices or common areas, where there was too much noise for the headphones to be effective.

Participants recommended having designated quiet zones that were large enough to accommodate anyone who needed to focus. They wanted these quiet areas well away from any common areas, doors, elevators, etc., to avoid noise carrying over from those workplace elements. Participants stressed that there should be multiple closed focus rooms and that these should be designed with comfortable furniture—one participant noted that sometimes quiet rooms feel like closets that were refurbished with leftover furniture, which takes away from an employee's ability to concentrate on their work instead of their surroundings.

Workpoint set-up

Individual workpoints were another area where participants felt there could be improvement. As discussed above, workplace noise was a huge problem for most participants. Many participants disliked their current workpoint set-up because it didn't permit them to see people coming, meaning they were taken by surprise and felt unsafe. While participants appreciated having sit-stand desks, some commented that their floor wasn't padded properly and it was difficult to stand comfortably. Participants also wanted to have access to the same ergonomic equipment at home that they had in the office, instead of having to choose one location to be made ergonomic.

Participants wanted their workpoints to be set up in such a way that they could see people approaching, and several commented that they preferred having their workpoints in a corner so that no one could be behind them. They wanted workpoints in quiet areas away from high-traffic zones. Participants stressed that the workpoint accommodations they received—such as wall panels, a sit-stand desk, or a closed office—should available to anyone who wanted them so that they wouldn't cause resentment among other employees. They also recommended that everyone have access to ergonomic equipment such as adjustable desks, dual monitors, and ergonomic chairs both at home and at the office.

Common areas

Participants pointed out multiple barriers in common areas such as kitchens and lockers. In kitchens, participants felt that they were too small for the amount of employees on a floor, particularly when it came to fridge space. Neither fridges nor lockers were seen to be big enough to accommodate larger lunch boxes—one participant commented that, because they keep their food separated they require a large lunch bag, and the only place they could keep the bag was on the floor in their office, which left little room to move. Participants also noted that lockers often weren't large enough to hold winter jackets and that they sometimes had difficulty locking the lockers.

Participants suggested ensuring that kitchens were large enough to hold the number of people on the floor and that there should be plentiful fridge space. They also noted that there should be someone assigned to clean fridges to keep them free of spoiled food. Some participants noted that any handles to fridges and cupboards should not require employees to turn them in order to avoid ergonomic strain. For lockers, participants thought that they should be tall enough to hang winter jackets but should have hooks at various heights to make them more accessible to

different people. They also noted that whatever locks were used needed to be simple and ergonomic.

Summary of Feedback

Symbol	Meaning
✓	The green checkmark icon means: this has been addressed by GCworkplace.
➖	The yellow line icon means: this has partially been addressed by GCworkplace.
✗	The red x icon means: this has not been addressed by GCworkplace.
✱	The blue asterix icon means: this is outside the scope of GCworkplace.

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
No choice of workpoints	✓	PSPC – GCworkplace Team	Workpoints are distributed to OPTIMIZE the workplace and reflect the functions of the organizations. Workpoints are not assigned or designed for individuals but rather for the optimum functionality of the workplace. The users have the freedom to choose their preferred work setting For more information: GCworkplace Design Guide - Part 3 Design Development, Section 3.2	December 2020	
Choice of workpoints only available at certain times (e.g. early in the morning)	✓	PSPC – GCworkplace Team	Taking considerations lessons learned from Workplace 2.0, GCworkplace is equipped with a large number of different workpoints. The users have the freedom to choose their preferred workpoints and setting according to their needs and preferences. As everyone is different, users should be able to find a workpoint that suits their needs. In some departments, it is also possible to reserve your workpoint in advance.	December 2020	

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
Loss of privacy	✓	PSPC – GCworkplace Team	Focus Work and Refuge: GCworkplace design focuses on improving access to visual and acoustic privacy. By recognizing that all employees can benefit from an environment that supports focus work or time to recharge, GCworkplace is designed to support all occupants. For more information: GCworkplace Design Guide, Part 2 Key Design Principles, Section 2.4.2	December 2020	
Too much noise	✓	PSPC – GCworkplace Team	Taking into consideration lessons learned from Workplace 2.0, GCworkplace is divided into 3 distinctive zones: a quiet zone, a transitional zone and a collaborative zone. The quiet and collaborative zones are usually at opposite sides of a floor and are composed of various enclosed or open workpoints. And the transitional zone is the one that allows the other two to co-exist. For more information: GCworkplace Design Guide - Design Guide	December 2020	

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
			Part 2 Key Design Principles		
Workpoints are set up so that employees can't see people approaching their desks	⊖	PSPC GCworkplace Team	GCworkplace offers a variety of options for everyone and an employee should be able to find many options that accommodate their preference, in this case, seeing people that are approaching their workpoint. However, following the feedback received, we suggest that a best practice would be to include some more enclosed options where the people are facing the door to help with this issue, for example, a focus room where the desk is facing the door. Accessibility tips will be added to the Technical Reference Manual. For more information: GCworkplace Technical Reference Manual	January 2021	Add accessibility tips to the Technical Reference Manual (to be launched in April 2021)
Floors are not padded so it's	✓	PSPC GCworkplace Team	It is an individual choice to work standing, and this choice is offered for a change of position during the	March 2021	

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
uncomfortable to stand at desk			day. There is no prescribed length of time.		
Keys for desk drawers are difficult to open and close	⊖	PSPC GCworkplace Team	In all GCworkplace fitups there is no personal storage at desks. Therefore employees should use their designated lockers which include a variety of different features. Mixed type of lockers is recommended to improve accessibility in terms of dexterity, mobility, capacity, needs and personal preferences. Provide a variety of locker's exterior and interior features such as handle, lock and hook.	March 2021	Add accessibility tips to the Technical Reference Manual (to be launched in April 2021)
Desks are not large enough for employees with a lot of paperwork	✅	PSPC GCworkplace Team	GCworkplace offers various workpoints or various shapes and size that could accommodate people that work with a lot of paperwork. Also, has GCworkplace is not a one size fits all approach, departments or teams that need space for paper can include some as needed in the design.	March 2021	

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
Lights are not adjustable at workpoints or in meeting rooms	✅	Office of Accessibility in the Built Environment (OABE) – PSPC AND PSPC GCworkplace Team	GCworkplace offers task lighting for various workpoints. It also suggest adding dimmable accent lighting for user adjustability. Accessibility tips are mentioned in the Technical Reference Manual.	January 2021	
Lack of natural light	✅	Office of Accessibility in the Built Environment (OABE) – PSPC AND PSPC GCworkplace Team	GCworkplace offers environments with more natural light, and views to the outside to promote mental and physical health and increase productivity. It Optimizes day light infiltration to reduce the need for artificial lighting.	January 2021	

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
Air circulation is not sufficient, leading to stale air	✓	Office of Accessibility in the Built Environment (OABE) – PSPC	GCworkplace office design layout tends to eliminate the stale air issue that is normally encountered by traditional partitioned offices. The more open office space layouts of GCworkplace design would thus improve air movements and air circulations, and prevents stale air accumulations due to the air stagnation condition.	March 2021	
Length of time to get accommodations	⊖	PSPC – GCworkplace Team AND Departments HR Branches	GCworkplace removes part of this issue as many requirements are already in the space (for example: height adjustable desks, ergonomic chairs, etc.). By integrating accessibility at the beginning of the design phase, GCworkplace is then promoting an inclusive, equitable and adaptive workplace.	December 2020	Transfer consultation results to departments to see how they can facilitate and accelerate accommodation requests.
Accommodation for non-visible disabilities are harder to get or are not thought of	✱	Departments HR Branches		December 2020	Transfer consultation results to departments to see how they can change the way non-visible disabilities are dealt with.

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
automatically like visible disabilities					
Need to always justify accommodation requests	✱	Departments HR Branches	Doctor's notes or ergonomic assessments are often questioned by managers.	December 2020	Transfer consultation results to departments to see how they can change the way accommodation requests are processed.
Accommodations are not available to everyone, so other employees resent people with accommodations	✱	Departments HR Branches			Transfer consultation results to departments to see how they can change the way accommodation requests are processed.
No flexibility to work from home without having to justify	➖	Departments HR Branches	Flexibility is one of the seven dimensions of GCworkplace. Flexibility allows employees to work where they will be the most productive for the tasks they have to accomplished, taking in consideration their schedule, preferences and needs. However, each department has their own rules on telework and remote working.	December 2020	

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
			During the pandemic, Government of Canada employees have shown that it is possible to be as productive from home as it is from the office.		
Ergonomic equipment isn't available at home (only at office, not both places)	✴	Departments HR Branches			Transfer consultation results to departments to see what can be done.
No automatic dispensers for water, soap, paper towel	⊖	Office of Accessibility in the Built Environment (OABE) – PSPC	OABE to provide information – work in progress due to COVID Application may vary depending on building owner and existing agreements.	December 2020	Where possible, automatic dispensers at reaching distance in a seated position is ideal.
Motion sensor lights in bathroom take too long to turn on	✴	Office of Accessibility in the Built Environment (OABE) – PSPC	It appears that the installed location of the motion light sensor needs to be reviewed for adjustment and repositioning to trigger a more accurate and faster response.	March 2021	
No document holders at personal	✴	Departments	Working digitally reduces the use of paper, printing and the paper storage	March 2021	

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
workpoints or in meeting rooms			burden. Therefore, if anyone needs one, they can ask their manager. In order to promote a shared space, personal storage must be removed from individual workpoints and centralized.		
Office desktop computers don't have cameras like laptops do, so employees have to use cell phones for video calls	✅	PSPC GCworkplace Team	In a GCworkplace, people use laptops to ensure they have the appropriate technology to be a mobile and flexible as possible. Some meeting rooms are also equipped with videoconference technology.		
Hallways and kitchens too narrow or cluttered	✅	Office of Accessibility in the Built Environment (OABE) – PSPC AND PSPC GCworkplace Team	CSA B651-18, 5.1 Accessible routes width has increased. An accessible path of travel is now 1700mm minimum wide and aisles are 1000mm min. Doorways are now 850mm. Post-COVID increase in GCworkplace designs. Accessibility tips will be added to the Technical Reference Manual, including space between tables and chairs, between counter tops and tables, etc.	December 2020	New buildings, new space acquisitions and fit-up projects will incorporate updated requirements as part of the design and implementation. Add accessibility tips to the Technical Reference Manual (to be launched in April 2021)

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
			For more information: GCworkplace Technical Reference Manual		
Not enough fridges	✅	PSPC GCworkplace Team	Quantity of fridges are pre-determined using a ratio according to the number of employees. The ratio is adequate, the quantities have been evaluated according to the number of occupants. See page 37 of Technical Reference Manual.	March 2021	
Lockers are not large enough for large lunch boxes or winter jackets	✅	PSPC GCworkplace Team	In a GCworkplace environment, Personal Storage Lockers are located outside of individual workpoints, and centralized in areas adjacent to circulation paths for easy access. Quantities and configurations should be determined in conjunction with client consultation. For example, consideration should be given to common items stored such as typical laptop size or other individual storage requirements. Accessibility tips will be added to the Technical Reference Manual. Tips could include adding hooks inside	December 2020	Add accessibility tips to the Technical Reference Manual (to be launched in April 2021)

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
			wardrobes and lockers instead of hangers, ensuring hangers are not attached to rods, including different types of lockers to meet the needs of employees. For more information: GCworkplace Technical Reference Manual		
Lockers difficult to open for people with dexterity issues	⊖	PSPC GCworkplace Team and possibly PSPC Accessible Procurement Group	Some research and possibly testing would need to be done to find the best solutions. This includes dexterity issues but would also include other types of disabilities (cannot see the lock, cannot remember the combination, etc.)	December 2020	Following the research, add accessibility tips to the Technical Reference Manual (to be launched in April 2021)
Lockers need hooks at different heights	✅	PSPC GCworkplace Team	Mixed type of Lockers is recommended to improve accessibility in terms of dexterity, mobility, capacity, needs and personal preferences. Provide a variety of Locker's exterior and interior features such as handle, lock and hook.	March 2021	Add accessibility tips to the Technical Reference Manual (to be launched in April 2021)
Heavy manual doors	⊖	Office of Accessibility	CSA B651-18 has a maximum weight requirement for opening a door.	December 2020	New buildings, new space acquisitions, and

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
		in the Built Environment (OABE) – PSPC	OABE is researching options for automatic door openers. Where applicable, it is recommended to offer vertical push buttons or door sensors.		fit-up projects will incorporate updated requirements as part of the design and implementation.
No reflection room or other private space	✅	PSPC GCworkplace Team	Focus Work and Refuge: GCworkplace design focuses on improving access to visual and acoustic privacy. By recognizing that all employees can benefit from an environment that supports focus work or time to recharge, GCworkplace is designed to support all occupants. For more information: GCworkplace Design Guide, Part 2 Key Design Principles, Section 2.4.2	January 2021	
Quiet spaces don't have comfortable furniture and feel like they're thrown together with leftover furniture	✅	PSPC GCworkplace Team	This described workplace was most certainly not a GCworkplace. Quite the opposite, GCworkplace offers a wide choice of different types of furniture including several ergonomic features.	March 2021	
No spaces for group training where other	✅	PSPC GCworkplace Team	GCworkplace is not a one size fits all model, which means that workpoints ratios and distributions can be	March 2021	

Issue/Barrier Raised	Already addressed by GCworkplace or others?	OPI	Explanation	Status Date	Future Improvements
people won't be disturbed			adjusted to meet the organisation needs and can be customized within a standard range. A user-centered design approach ensures that a proper process is followed for requirements gathering which relies on user surveying. This process then leads to the ideal design solution for the organization. Meeting rooms and project rooms can be reconfigurable to become a multifunctional space. i.e. Training, meeting, brainstorming.. Furthermore, more often than not, large training facilities are considered SPS and therefore are designed especially according to the client's specific needs.		
No bike storage	✳	PSPC – Property and Facility Management Service Line		March 2021	Transfer consultation results to PSPC's Facility Management Service Line to see if/how they can fix the issue.