

Access Arrangements

Our management of access arrangements is based on our determination to secure the best possible outcomes for all our students. This means taking a personalised approach to each individual student. To this end, we encourage students and their parents/carers to take a central role in developing the appropriate response to special needs that might lead to applications for access arrangements.

'Access Arrangements' is the term we use to describe the extra support given to a small minority of our students during their exams. They stand under the Equality Act, 2010 and the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995 and are designed as a response to 'substantial', 'long term' impairments that prevent a person from carrying out his or her normal day to day activities. They are given to 'take away a disadvantage' with which a student might be struggling. For example, a visually impaired child might be given an enlarged exam paper to help him or her to read it. The rules governing access arrangements are strictly administered by JCQ, the governing body responsible for the oversight of public exams, such as GCSE and A Levels. All Notre Dame applications for students' access arrangements are subject to JCQ decisions. When choosing their courses, students and their parents should bear in mind that there may be no concessions available for specific needs within certain subjects. Individual subject departments will be able to offer further information and advice.

The conditions that necessitate an application for access arrangements are very specific and happen quite rarely. In order for the School to consider applying for access arrangements, a student must have a 'history of need'. In other words, the student must have needed additional support over an extended period of time and the School must have evidence of both the need and the provision needed to overcome it. Evidence of need may come from specific in-house assessments, from a service such as an educational psychology report, commissioned by the School or from information gathered from teachers. Occasionally, the School is presented with non-commissioned evidence from external agencies. However, there is no guarantee that this will be accepted by JCQ and the School will need to provide a reasoned case for putting this forward as evidence of need. Evidence of provision comes from the student's 'normal way of working'. This means we must have evidence that the ongoing interventions put in place by the School effectively alleviate a substantial disadvantage. Final decisions whether or not such evidence constitutes sufficient need to apply for access arrangements remain with the School. **JCQ's deadline for applying for access arrangements for the summer 2017 exam season is 21st February 2017.** Thereafter, only emergency applications, such as a student breaking his or her arm, necessitating the use of a scribe, will be considered. If evidence of need is not established clearly before this date, any application for access arrangements would be invalid.

If evidence of need is established and JCQ agree with our analysis, students may be entitled to a variety of access arrangements, including use of a laptop, rest breaks, use of a reader and/or scribe (scribing with a laptop as opposed to handwriting is now the preferred method in most cases), a prompt to keep them on task or extra time. All of these must be established as the students' normal way of working' in order to provide a history of need.

We must emphasise the rarity of students qualifying for access arrangements. Failure to finish assessments or exams, for example, would not normally be considered 'evidence of need' and in most cases of this nature, students are better served by participation in one of the School's 'exam paper management' programmes. Again, the final decision in these cases must remain with the School.

There are instances when access arrangements extend to a student being accommodated away from his/her fellow students, usually in a smaller room. This arrangement is only considered where there is clear evidence of students being disadvantaged by sitting their exams with their peers. It is normal for students to feel high levels of anxiety before exams. Without specific additional evidence, usually from a qualified expert, combined with a long term history of need identified within the School, this would not justify an application for access arrangements. If such access arrangements are put in place, the School retains the final decision in the size and location of alternative accommodation.

Every student with access arrangements is on the School's SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) Support List and has his/her own SEND support plan. This enables us to review the effectiveness of any interventions. If a student shows over time that he or she no longer needs the support outlined in his/her plan, his/her access arrangements will be reviewed.

Access arrangements are a complicated subject and in most cases it would be advisable for students and parents/carers with concerns to contact the SEN Department directly for more detailed information.