

Statement from St John's Law Graduate, Ben Gauntlett

St John's College aspires to give students with disabilities the greatest opportunity to succeed in undertaking their studies in Oxford. However, this intent is balanced with legal requirements relating to old buildings. For example, fire safety and heritage concerns.

As the College came into existence in 1555, it has many old buildings. Sadly, this means the College is often constrained in what it can do to assist students with disabilities. In my opinion, though, the College has an impeccable social conscience. Therefore, where possible, the College has in the past made modifications to assist students in accessing resources and facilities to improve their College experience.

Further, the College acknowledges disability access is an area requiring continuous monitoring. As a consequence, the College has regular meetings relating to equality and takes very seriously any concerns expressed.

My Reason for Coming to Oxford

I am a quadriplegic following a rugby union accident in Australia aged 16. I came to St John's College to do a D.Phil in Competition Law. Initially, I found it awkward to negotiate my way around aspects of the College. Access did exist but it required someone to point out where to find certain access points. However, in time I have learnt to appreciate the efforts of the College and its staff in assisting me to both undertake my studies and be a part of every day student life. There are frustrations, but balanced against this is a very real intent to try to integrate all students into everyday aspects of College life.

Access around the College

Fortunately, the College has a number of accessible and adapted rooms and also has a new quadrangle being built which has received extensive guidance so as to satisfy the needs of students with a variety of disabilities. All rooms are both spacious and well designed. In terms of communal areas, the College dining hall has excellent wheelchair access. Similarly, the College bar is accessible. Where required, staff in both areas will assist with any needs a student has to obtain food and drink. Mail, laundry and kitchen facilities are difficult to use. But where this is the case, the College will try and make alternative arrangements.

Associated Services

If you require access to health care services, the College has a relationship with the local doctor's surgery and has its own nurse. However, the nurse is only present for short periods and does not provide regular, individualised care. A student coming to the College requiring care has to set up their own arrangements. This can be done through the local doctor's surgery and the Oxford County Council. I always found that the staff working for these organisations were accessible and extremely helpful. Early contact is vital, though, as arrangements can take some time to set up.

Considerations before Applying

I encourage any student with a significant disability to visit the College before applying. Each disability is different and no guide can adequately describe all relevant issues. Where possible, the College is only too willing to provide accommodation and give guided tours. Equally, the College has maintained excellent links with former students with disabilities and will facilitate the making of contact to discuss any concerns. I wish you all the best in your application.