



Open College of the Arts

Student Support

Getting the most out of your course

A handbook for students

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1: WELCOME TO THE OCA PARTNERSHIP

Welcome to the Open College of the Arts. We hope you enjoy studying with us.

This handbook is designed to answer the various questions you may have about the OCA, our courses, the teaching and learning model, and our terms and conditions. We suggest you read it through once as soon as possible after you receive your course materials. Obviously you won't remember the fine detail but it will give you a good overview.

We also suggest you keep it in a safe place so as to be able to refer to it as and when queries arise. The accompanying document (Student Regulations) will also be useful as and when you need to explore the OCA's policies and procedures.

Partnership

If there is one point about which all of us in the OCA are absolutely clear it is that to be successful we need to harness the contributions of *everyone* involved – learners, tutors and Head Office staff. Although it can sound like a cliché we are serious about wanting the whole to be much, much more than the sum of its parts. This handbook is designed to help make this happen.

Partnership working is the theme which underpins all that we do. All of us involved with the OCA have not only rights – but also the responsibilities which flow from those rights. We plan to draft a Partnership Statement, which will set out those rights and responsibilities very clearly. This will be developed jointly between the OCA and the new Student Association, with a view to being issued early next year (2012). This will be added to this Handbook in Chapter 4.

Structure of Handbook

The rest of this Handbook is effectively in four sections, as follows.

- First, we provide some basic information about how to study with the OCA – including the learning model and assessment process. Developing our skills in the creative arts is why students enrol in the first case and so it's essential to know how to get the best out of the investment in learning.
- Second, we provide some background information on the OCA as an institution – including its courses, students and delivery structures. As a member of the OCA community it's important you have a feel for the bigger picture and how your course module fits into this canvas.
- Third, we describe how to get more involved – including through the Student Association and contributions to the lively online community.
- Fourth, we set out information on fees and financial aspects – including policies on refunds and extensions, and sources of financial support.

Regulations, Procedures and Policies

An accompanying document (Student Regulations) contains all the relevant regulations, procedures and policies. For many students this will not be immediately relevant but we want to minimise the risk of misunderstandings and frustrations and hence provide transparent information on 'the small print'.

In particular, students are directed towards the Conditions of Enrolment which they are required to subscribe to as a student with the OCA.

Other sources of help

However comprehensive this document is, you may still have questions which are not addressed in the text. In these cases:

- have a look first at the FAQ section of the main website (www.oca-uk.com). These are updated regularly.
- if your question is mainly about your course and academic matters, have a word first with your tutor. He or she will be able either to provide the answer or advise you who to contact at Head Office.
- if your question is mainly about terms and conditions, please contact Head Office direct, either by email (enquiries@oca-uk.com) or by telephone (0800 731 2116).
- if your question is about how it feels to be a student and how to pick up tips from experience, post an item on the forum pages of the student website (<http://oca-student.com/>).¹

We have issued Student Handbooks before, but this edition has been written from scratch. The main reason for this is that the profile of the OCA has changed over recent years. Whilst we still welcome learners whose main motivation is to complete a single course module out of personal interest, we are now enrolling increasing numbers of learners wanting to pursue a full degree programme. We therefore want to ensure that *both* groups of learners have access to the information that will help them derive the maximum benefit from their studies.

As a new document we recognise that it may still have gaps or passages which are difficult to follow. Please do let us have your suggestions for improvement. They should be sent, preferably by email, to andrewwatson@oca-uk.com

¹ In due course, it should also be able to seek advice from the student association (OCASA). The latter is currently (July 2011) in the process of being established. Regular updates on progress with the constitution and services are posted on the OCA blog (<http://www.weareoca.com/>) and in the weekly e-bulletin.

2: STUDYING WITH THE OCA

This chapter provides practical help on studying with the OCA. It is in three main sections:

- the first gives tips from experience on studying from home;
- the second explains the importance of the Learning Log and provides some advice as to how to keep one that reflects your interests and personal style;
- the third provides some practical information on the assessment process.

Much of the material is reproduced from Study Guides which are freely available (including on the web). However, the material is so central to making the most of your time with the OCA that we decided to include it in this handbook.

Studying from home

Starting out

When you receive your materials there are several things we would recommend you do straightaway. For example:

- check that you have everything that is listed in the pack and let us know immediately if anything is missing;
- skim through the course just to check it's roughly what you were expecting. If you have any concerns at this point, remember that you have a 14 day money back guarantee. However, *it's essential to act quickly*;
- read through the Conditions of Enrolment carefully to ensure you are clear about where you stand and what to do if anything goes wrong;
- send some details about yourself to your tutor so that he or she will know something of your background, experience and current level of skills;
- register for the student website so as to access the additional resources which are available only to enrolled students (see next section);
- read through the Study Guides which provide specialist information relevant to your course (e.g. how to make use of the Bridgeman Education Art Library).

We suggest you make a start with the course itself *as soon as possible*. With open learning it helps to build up some momentum. Start off as you mean to continue!

Student website

Registering for the student website is very straightforward since staff at OCA Head Office start the process on your behalf. You should receive your username and password within five working days of your enrolment being processed. However, if you haven't received the details by the end of the fifth day, please send an email containing your student number and full name to help@oca-uk.com and we will ensure that your details are issued promptly to you by email.

Projects

Projects are completed at regular intervals throughout the course. The advantage of projects is that they break learning into small manageable pieces and give you a chance to evaluate your own improvement along the way.

Assignments

Assignments are usually in the form of a more substantial set of tasks that allow you to bring together what you have learned from the projects. The teaching materials clearly tell you when you need to produce the assignment. The completed assignment gives your personal tutor an idea about what you have learned so far so that he/she can advise you about your progress.

Written assignments

Written assignments could be in the form of essays, reports, reflective notes, Learning Log, evaluations or, at Level 3 (HE6)², a 3,500 word critical review. Writing assignments helps you to focus your learning and usually requires a certain amount of personal research. You will also learn new skills, such as accurate academic referencing, which will refine your writing.

Written tutor feedback

OCA has an excellent system of open learning feedback. You will receive positive, constructive comments from your personal tutor that support your learning and progress on the course.

The tutor's task is to challenge as well as encourage you, so please don't be defensive about receiving constructive criticism. Taking on board sound advice from experienced artists and educators is the best way to make progress. You won't develop very much if all you are told is that you are 'doing very well'!

Peer and self-assessment

You can learn a lot from assessing your own and others' work. This is actively encouraged and made possible through the OCA website's gallery (www.oca-student.com/galleries).

Managing your time

Most people who have problems with managing their time fall into one of the following categories:

- having too much to do in too little time;
- having lots of time, but not getting a lot done.

Whether you've got weeks to go or you've left everything until the last minute, the most important thing to remember is to *make the best of the time you have*. If you find it hard to get down to work at all, you'll need to find ways to motivate yourself.

Top tips

Motivation

The key advice here is:

- to set daily goals
- to make a list of what you want to achieve, and make sure it's realistic.

Break down tasks

Studying successfully in one long session is never going to happen. Huge chunks of work can be daunting, so study briefly and regularly, dividing your work into small chunks.

Ease yourself in

Tackle small tasks first and only progress to more demanding ones after you've built up your confidence and seen evidence of your progress. The study materials are carefully phased to help set the right pace.

Listen to your body clock

If you're an early bird, work when you get up and are feeling fresh. If mornings aren't your thing, set aside time in the afternoon or evening instead.

Make a timetable

Plan what you're going to do and when. You'll find more advice on planning and timing your studies below.

² Historically the OCA has referred to course modules as being at 'Levels 1, 2 or 3'; these levels equate approximately to undergraduate Years 1, 2 and 3. However, the terminology used in the Credits Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) is different, with OCA Level 1 equating to HE4. We therefore use *both* descriptions to minimise the risk of confusion.

Take time out

Working 24/7 without a break would drive even the most conscientious of students to distraction!

When your brain can't take any more, take a break, go and watch the television, see your friends or grab a sandwich.

Learn more by doing

Just passively reading the teaching materials is not the best way to work - you need to take an active approach and do the practical projects as directed.

Making regular notes in your Learning Log and carefully doing the practical work will help you to progress.

Plan your study time

Most of us start studying with grand plans and a tough timetable. Although this might seem a good idea, it can be demotivating, too. If you set yourself unrealistic expectations, you'll end up falling behind and wanting to just pack it all in. Following the guidelines in this section will help you make a schedule that you'll be more likely to stick to.

Start early

If you've got plenty of time, use it! Devise your study time to start early enough so there'll be no last-minute panics if something unexpected comes up.

Think outside study

You might have to cut down on the time you spend socialising, but don't put your life 'on hold' until the course is over. Plan your study around the other things in your diary, such as exercise and family commitments.

Extra time

Include some 'blank time' in your schedule. Sometimes you need to spend extra time on something you've already tried but found hard, or to catch up if you've fallen behind.

Take a break

As we said before, make sure you take time out for a snack or drink or chat with friends. Taking on too much will leave you stressed out and fed up.

Be flexible

If you find that your study timetable isn't working because you've made it too easy or hard for yourself, change it.

More help

If you feel you need to improve your study skills, help with completing assignments or writing critical reviews, then contact your tutor: they are there to help you. You can also get support from other students who might have completed or are also doing the same course as you. Go to <http://oca-student.com> for details.

Learning Logs

Your Learning Log is the tool you use to help you reflect on your learning and help your tutor see how you have progressed. If you are planning to get your work assessed, it is vital that you keep a good, thorough and comprehensive Learning Log. The Learning Log (or its equivalent in Creative Writing and Music courses) makes a significant contribution to your assessment marks and you could fail if you do not show how you arrived at your final pieces of work by documenting the route you took to get there in your Learning Log.

What is a Learning Log?

A Learning Log is a record of your own learning. It is not a formal academic piece of work but a document that is unique to you: it cannot be *right* or *wrong*, although there are some ways of presenting your material are more effective than others. For example, cross referencing sections of it with your assignment work will help an assessor months later to follow the structure.

The Learning Log helps you to record, structure, reflect upon, plan, develop and evidence your own learning and skills development. It is not just a diary or record of 'what you have done', but a record of what you have learned, tried and - critically - *reflected upon*. Though your Learning Log is not a formal piece of work, critical reflection is an important part of your study and is assessed, so do think about how you structure your log to make your thinking straightforward for the assessors to review.

What it looks like

The Learning Log could take a variety of forms and be any size. Bear in mind that, if you submit your work for assessment, your Learning Log must be sent by post or courier with your other work (but see next paragraph); an A3 or A4 sized hard backed book is probably best.

Many students now prefer to produce a Learning *Blog* rather than a *Log*. This is fine. However, if you do blog your learning reflections, you need to bear a couple of things in mind:

- First, it's important to make sure you send the url in with your work to your tutor and/or for assessment - and it's also important that you check that the link works before you do this.
- Second, it's essential that you categorise and tag your blog so that it is absolutely clear for the tutor/assessor where to find the relevant pieces of your blog. This is especially important when it comes to assessment, since you will lose marks if the assessor is unable to find supportive back up studies in your blog relevant to a particular project.

Is there a correct way of producing a Learning Log?

Your Learning Log should be relevant to *you* and your studies. Three helpful questions when you write in your Learning Log are:

- Am I being honest with myself?
- Is this a useful process for me?
- Is this helping my own process of learning?

If the answers are 'yes' then your Learning Log is probably right for you. If the answers are 'no' then perhaps you need help, advice or guidance about your Learning Log. Discuss it with your tutor.

Keeping a Learning Log

Your Learning Log can contain drawings, photocopies, postcards, press cuttings, musical scores, and notes on visits to museums and exhibitions, readings or literary festivals (especially for creative writing students), and concerts (especially if you are studying music). It might include your current thoughts on your subject or your enthusiasm for a particular artist, writer or composer that you have just discovered.

Just pasting in a reproduction isn't enough – you also need to say *why* it intrigues you.

Retain the information from your tutor

Keep any written information you receive from your tutor in your Learning Log. Students *must* file all their tutor reports, copies of questions they send to their tutor and answers to these questions. That way you have a record of the dialogue between you and your tutor.

Include details of things you have done to aid your learning. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Did it go well? Why? What did I learn?
- Did it go badly? Why? What did I learn?

- How can I improve for next time?

Beginnings and endings

At the beginning of the course write in your Learning Log what your hopes, plans and expectations are. Then - when the course is completed - write a brief note on what you have achieved and how you feel your attitudes have changed.

Write about your progress too

Your Learning Log must contain your responses to the *What have you achieved?* and *Check and log* sections that appear at the end of projects or exercises in most course materials.

Reflect and write up your conclusions about how what you have learned is relevant to you and how you will use the new information, knowledge, skill, or technique in the future. This is one of the most important things to document in your Learning Log. Your Learning Log should be a history of your progress through the course.

Show how your understanding of the subject has developed

Your Learning Log should show that you have an increasing grasp of the background and history of the subject you are studying. It should show that you have seen various artists' works, read certain writers' work, or listened to various pieces of music. You should be able to relate their work to your own and demonstrate that you understand the context of their work in the history of the subject.

Record things

Record your experiences, thoughts, feelings and reflections in your Learning Log, such as courses you went on, exhibitions you visited, books you have read, concerts/gigs you've been to, discussions you have had, internet sites you have looked at, television programmes you have watched. Don't just record the bare facts, though: add your personal comments on all of these things.

Record details of problems you have encountered and solved - or *not* solved - and what you have learned from this. More advice is given on reflecting after every learning experience in the Study Guide entitled Keeping Sketchbooks and Learning Logs.

Persevere

Skills rarely suddenly develop or improve 'overnight'. Gaining new knowledge and applying it within a skills context usually takes time, effort and perseverance. A Learning Log will help you to become more aware of how you learn, what learning tasks you enjoy and of how you think.

At first it may seem difficult to start to reflect critically upon your own learning, but over time you will find that it becomes easier. The more often you practise the skill of self-reflection, the easier it will become.

Assessment

For some learners, simply completing the course module and improving your skills is the goal. For others – an increasing number – the course module is a step along a longer path to obtaining a qualification. For those in this latter group, it is essential to go through the formal assessment process so as to obtain the Higher Education credits attached to your course module (see Chapter 3).

Your tutor will be able to advise you on whether it will be realistic to think in terms of going on for an HE qualification. If you are in two minds, we would encourage you to go through the assessment process as it is always useful to have the credits, just in case you decide to carry on to get a qualification later.

How do I apply?

The Assessment Application Form is available online at the OCA Student website: <http://oca-student.com/key-resources>. Anyone unable to access this or print it off is welcome to contact us at Head Office and ask for a copy to be put in the post.

The Assessment Application Form includes an Affirmation section which you will need to sign as evidence that your assessment submission is your own work. The Affirmation is particularly significant as the OCA is committed to identifying plagiarism and taking firm action. More details on this are given in the Plagiarism and Malpractice in Coursework and Assessments Policy in the Student Regulations.

When do I apply?

Apply for formal assessment when you have completed your penultimate assignment. That way, you have no chance of missing out on getting assessed when the time comes.

Three assessment events are currently held each year for undergraduate programmes; these are in March, July and November. However, the dates for postgraduate assessment boards are different: please check on this with your tutor.

The deadline dates for receipt of undergraduate Assessment Application Forms and the subsequent submissions are as follows:

- March event - applications must be received by 31st January, with submissions received by 15 February (please don't send them before 15th January);
- July event - applications must be received by 31st May, with submissions received by 15 June (please don't send them before 15th May);
- November event - applications must be received by 30th September, with submissions received by 15th October (please don't send them before 15th September).

What do I submit?

For assessment you must send a cross-section of the work you have done on the course module, plus your Learning Log (or url to your Blog), sketchbooks or manuscript books (as relevant to your course), and your tutor reports (plus redrafts where appropriate). For each course there are specific guidelines which advise exactly what you must submit for formal assessment. These are published on the OCA student website under Key Resources: <http://oca-student.com/key-resources>. We advise students to read these at the beginning of their course in order to think ahead for assessment preparation.

It's important to make sure that you submit *all* the required elements for the assessment, as failure to do so may have a detrimental result on the mark awarded and could even result in your submission failing.

After your submission has been received by the OCA, you will be sent a Buckinghamshire New University³ enrolment form that needs to be filled in and returned. This ensures you will be in a position to be awarded the credits attached to your course (provided you are successful, of course).

The assessment process

Assessors see portfolios of work and mark according to an agreed scheme that applies to all portfolios. They consider whether your work shows evidence of having achieved the expected outcomes for the course module and decide at what level your work should be marked.

They confer to agree a final mark which is recorded by the OCA. This mark is provisional and subject to modification by the accrediting university. This is standard procedure in all UK universities.

³ References to the validating university in this section are to Buckinghamshire New University, as this university provides validation and accreditation services for all OCA's undergraduate courses. The equivalent role for postgraduate courses is fulfilled by the University for the Creative Arts.

Please note that the OCA cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage to any work submitted for assessment, however caused, and you are strongly advised to keep copies or a record of any work submitted, wherever possible. After the assessment we will return your work to you through our courier unless you have indicated differently.

Assessors

Assessors are selected from the ranks of experienced tutors who have knowledge not only of OCA modules and teaching/learning processes, but also of assessment processes more widely in an HE context. All assessors are specifically approved by Buckinghamshire New University, before taking on the additional, specialist role.

Each student portfolio is reviewed by *two* internal assessors. The marks to be allocated are agreed between them. All assessments are subject to subsequent review by the external examiner(s), formally appointed by Buckinghamshire New University.

Marks

Once the marks are ratified, the results are issued to you, specifying the course module and the mark awarded. Information on results cannot be provided before this procedure has taken place.

Your submission is marked against set criteria. The percentage mark you obtain will fall within a Higher Education classification band. We add the table below so that students who have not experienced Higher Education before can become familiar with the terminology used for degree classifications.

| % Mark | HE Classification Bands |
|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 70% or above | 1 st |
| 60 - 69% | 2:1 |
| 50 - 59% | 2:2 |
| 40 - 49% | 3 rd |
| 39% or below | Fail |

If you fail, you are allowed to resubmit your work after moderation. You would, however, only be able to obtain a capped pass mark of 40% and the resubmission must be assessed within 12 months of the original assessment date.

50% - 59% is regarded as a good mark, showing that work submitted demonstrates significant achievement and competence. 40% - 49% should not be regarded as evidence of a lack of ability or as a near-fail; it is a clear pass, showing ability and competence, but with potential for further development. 70% and above and Fails (below 40%) are awarded relatively rarely.

Please note that the final degree classification is usually the average of marks obtained in assessment *at Level 3 (HE6) only*, unless there have been any pre-known mitigating circumstances that the University Award Board has taken into account. Thus, results achieved at Levels 1 (HE4) and 2 (HE5) - whilst significant to the individual and the tutor – do not generally influence the final classification awarded for the degree as a whole.

Results

Once you have had your work formally assessed, you will receive a Breakdown of Marks letter showing the marks you have been awarded and any comments made by the assessors.

We aim to return your work and send you a breakdown of your mark no later than two months after the last day of the assessment month.

A delivery supplement is required for the return of work to certain destinations (see the Assessment Application Form for details)

Appeals

Appeals on assessment marks can only be made when there has been a *procedural* irregularity, such as an error in recording/calculating marks or a failure on the part of the OCA to provide appropriate tuition. Simply being unhappy with your assessment result does *not* constitute grounds for grievance.

In the event of an appeal against the administration of the assessment process, OCA will handle the appeal in the first instance. If the appeal cannot be resolved using the OCA procedures, students may pursue the appeal with the validating university – but here, too, dissatisfaction with the marks is *not* recognised as valid grounds for appeal.

More details on this are set out in the Appeals Against Assessment Outcomes procedure in the Student Regulations.

External examiners

External examiners are experienced assessors in their own field and hold (or have recently held) senior academic posts in relevant university departments. They are recruited according to Buckinghamshire New University guidelines and are approved through the Faculty Quality and Enhancement Committee - and ratified by Senate. In order to retain an independent edge, they serve for a finite period only (typically for 4 years).

The roles of the external examiners are:

- to act as independent and impartial advisers, providing informed comments on academic standards;
- to moderate the achievement of students against the standards as set, ensuring that the assessment process is conducted fairly, in accordance with the approved degree course structure, content and regulations, and without prejudice to any students;
- to ensure that the standard of any award is comparable to the standard of similar awards in other UK HE institutions.

3: ABOUT THE OCA AND OUR COURSES

This chapter provides a brief overview of the OCA as an institution and as a provider of courses. Most of this will not affect your day to day studies but, as a partnership organisation, we want to make sure that students are well informed about the broader picture.

There are several short sections, as follows:

- Brief history
- Legal entity
- Statement of Purpose
- Open access policy
- Trustees
- Committees
- Executive
- Tutors
- Students
- Levels and credits
- Course modules
- Degrees pathways in outline
- Validating universities
- Quality Assurance

Brief history

OCA was founded in 1987 by Michael Young (Lord Young of Dartington, founder of the Open University and the Consumers' Association) to offer the general public the chance to take high quality arts courses by open learning, without prior qualifications or restrictions. His vision was to transform people's lives, giving them the opportunity and skills to express their creative talents under the guidance of professional artists.

Since then the OCA has developed its range of courses, whilst still focusing on creative practical arts. We have also introduced externally validated HE qualifications which comply with precisely the same quality standards as qualifications obtained through traditional campus based, full-time courses.

Legal entity

The OCA is an arts education charity. It is registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales (registration number 327446).

In addition to being a registered charity, the OCA is also a company limited by guarantee. This means that no profit is – or indeed *could ever be* – taken out of the College in the form of dividends. Any operating surplus is either used to develop new course modules or channelled into the Learner Support Fund to provide financial support for potential learners who are experiencing hardship of some kind (see Chapter 4).

Statement of purpose

A revised statement of purpose for the OCA was agreed with Trustees in 2009. This was as follows:

'To widen access to Creative Arts Education at Undergraduate and Graduate levels through Open and Flexible Learning'.

Open access policy

Consistent with Michael Young's original vision, the OCA remains an open access College, with a commitment to widening participation in Higher Education. In brief the implications are these:

- no formal qualifications are required to enrol on course modules at undergraduate level;
- courses can be studied from any location and do not require students to travel to attend classes. This is of particular relevance for those with mobility constraints, or who live in remote areas, or who are in custodial institutions;
- there are no age limits, although we do not normally accept enrolments from students who are under 16 or who are under 19 and still at school or college. Exceptionally we may agree to enrolments from students in these categories, provided the application is supported by the student's current institution;
- students can enrol at any time of the year and study at their own pace, as there is no traditional academic year cycle⁴;
- the College offers accreditation of prior learning to enable students to access course modules at levels which are appropriate to their skills and knowledge (see later section in his chapter).

Trustees

Those ultimately accountable for the stewardship of the OCA are the Trustees (currently 9). As at July 2011, the Trustees were:

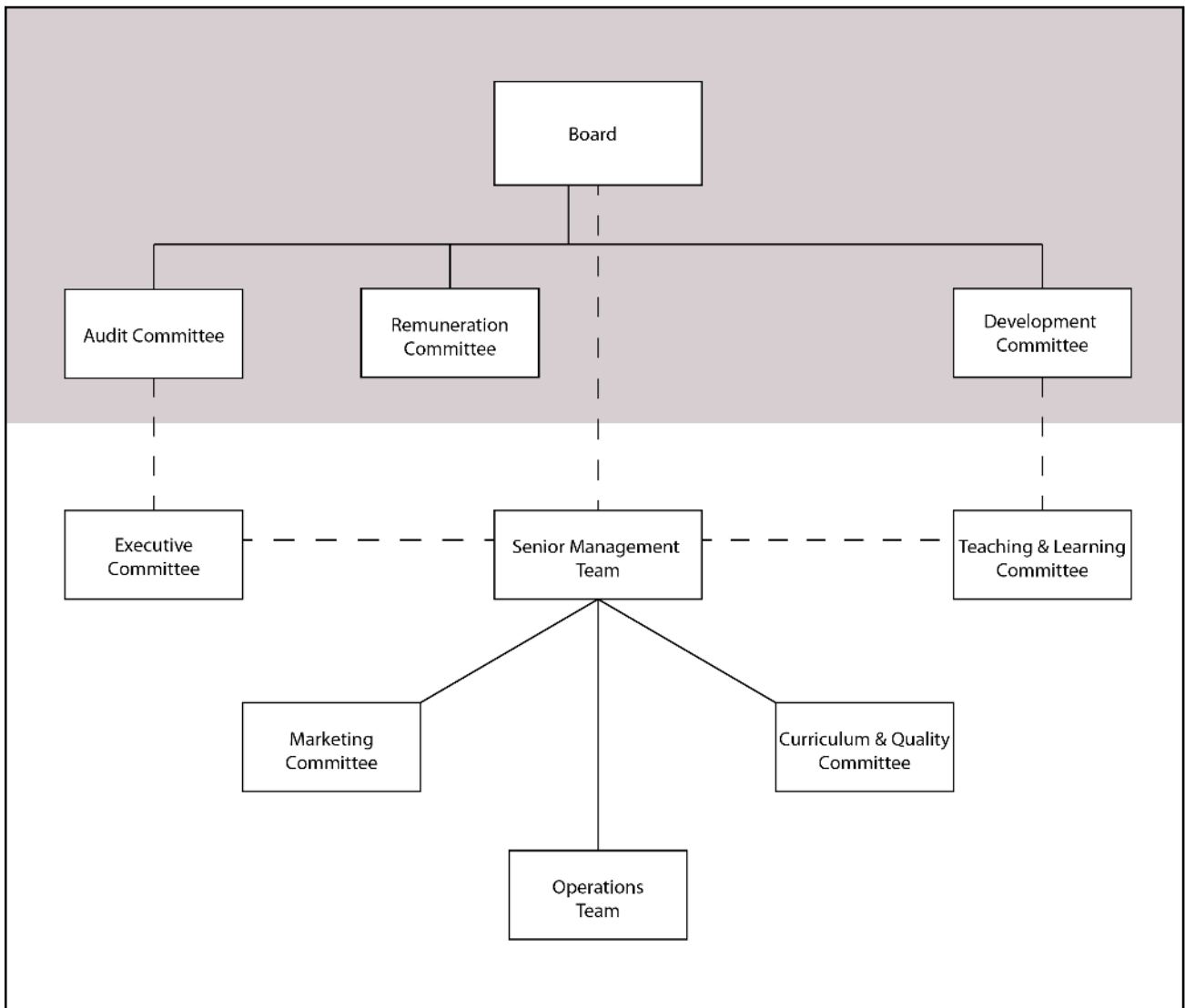
- Chris Jelley (Chairman), former Head of Education and Children's Broadcasting at Yorkshire Television, a non-executive director of Bradford Hospitals Trust and Board Member of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority;
- Cathy Baxandall, Company Secretary of Marshalls Group (a FTSE top 100 quoted company) and a board member of Yorkshire Youth and Music;
- (Very Reverend) Peter Bradley, Dean of Sheffield and Chair of the Cathedral's Archer Project Charitable Trust, the largest charity in the South Yorkshire region working with the homeless;
- Shiela Carlton, former Associate Director of NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education);
- (Professor) Patsy Cullen, former Director of Learning and Teaching at York St John University and former Head of Learning Resources at the National Arts Education Archive at Bretton Hall. She is a Board Member of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and a member of the HEFCE Disability Monitoring Panel;
- Peggotty Graham, former Dean of Social Sciences at the Open University;
- Doreen Killick, Assistant Principal at the Orion Pax Institute and a former Head of Learner Services at Doncaster College. She is also a Trustee of the Open College Network;
- (Professor) Jackie Marsh, Head of the School of Education, University of Sheffield, who has taught (inter alia) on open learning postgraduate courses at diploma, master's and doctoral level;
- Ros Morpeth, former Director of the National Extension College.

⁴ The MA is an exception to this general rule as students are assigned to a specific cohort which enrolls at a fixed point in the year (currently February).

Committees

The following figure sets out the decision making structure of the College.

Committee Structure of the OCA



From a student perspective it is the Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) which is perhaps of the most direct relevance. The TLC has overall responsibility for overseeing the academic work of the College and, in particular, the delivery of courses. This includes ensuring that effective arrangements for the validation and review of courses, quality assurance, and assessment are in place.

The College seeks to respond positively to suggestions for development, and values the views of its students who are represented at these meetings via the OCA Students' Association (OCASA) officers. Representation is planned through the President and Vice-President.

Executive

Strategic, academic and operational planning is led by the Chief Executive (Gareth Dent), supported by an Executive Team of eight.

The Executive Team comprises:

- Jane Horton, Curriculum Director;
- Andrew Watson, Director of Operations;

- Alison Churchill, Director of Teaching and Learning Quality;
- Malcolm Thompson, Finance Director;
- Dee Whitmore, Head of Operations;
- Stephanie Gillott, Academic Registrar;
- Woody Whittick, Head of Learner Support;
- Paul Vincent, Webmaster.

Tutors

For individual learners, the support from their individual tutor will be critical. In all there are about 125 tutors in our national network. These are experienced educators and practising artists who are specialists in their field and work from their own homes/studios/offices. The profiles of many of our tutors can be viewed on the OCA website (<http://www.oca-uk.com/info/our-tutors>); some profiles also include links to tutors' own websites, where you can view their work.

Important note on access to tutors

Sometimes students have additional points they would like to raise with tutors between assignments. This is fine within reason, but please bear in mind that OCA tutors, unlike many tutors at conventional art colleges, are paid on the basis of numbers of assignments reviewed and are not on full-time contracts.

In order to give an idea of what would be 'reasonable':

- for a query requiring a short (5-minute) response from your tutor – no more than once a week;
- for queries requiring longer and more considered responses – no more than once a month.

Please also bear the following points in mind:

- Many queries can be answered by referring to the material in this Handbook and the other documents and videos on the website. Please read these documents carefully.
- Keep your queries short and to the point.
- Allow a few days for the tutor to respond. Be aware they may be away or have teaching or other professional commitments outside the OCA.
- Make sure your queries relate to your work and assignments. Other queries (e.g. terms and conditions) should be addressed directly to the OCA Head Office.

Do also make full use of the student forums to discuss ideas and gain inspiration from fellow students and tutors.

Students

Currently around 2,000 students start a new course module with us every year – many of them new to the OCA and others re-enrolling after completing previous course modules. The total number of students active at any one time is around 1.5 times that figure (i.e. around 3,000) as many students take more than a year to complete their course module.

There is a good balance across the ages of students, although older students are in an overall majority (c46% are under 45). Overall, there are more female students (c67%) than male.

There is a broad spectrum of students from widening participation sections of the community. A 'snapshot' taken on 8 August 2010 of students currently on programme revealed that:

- 7.25% had declared special needs;
- 9.5% had a stated highest qualifications *lower than A level*;
- 1.0% were detained in prison.

During 2011 a new Student Association is being established. For more details see Chapter 4.

Levels and credits

All OCA course modules are accredited and qualify for HE credits under the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS). All OCA Level 1 (HE4) modules carry 40 credits, whilst all Level 2 (HE5) and 3 (HE6) modules carry 60 credits. These equate approximately to 400 and 600 guided learning hours, respectively.

For students planning to follow a pathway to a full degree (BA Hons), the following credits are required:

- 3 course modules at Level 1 (HE4) adding up to 120 credits (3 x 40);
- 2 course modules at Level 2 (HE5) adding up to 120 credits (2 x 60);
- 2 course modules at Level 3 (HE6) adding up to 120 credits (2 x 60).

Students who set out on a pathway to a full degree, but who have to end their studies before reaching the target number of credits, may still be eligible for a lower level qualification:

- the Certificate in Higher Education (Cert HE) requires 120 credits at Level 1 (HE4);
- the Diploma in Higher Education (Dip HE) requires 240 credits. Typically this would comprise 120 credits at Level 1 (HE4) and 120 credits at Level 2 (HE5);
- the BA Ordinary (i.e. not Hons) degree requires 300 credits and would typically be awarded to a student who had successfully completed all but the *second* Level 3 (HE6) course in the degree pathway.

However, we do not advise students to leave with the lower level qualifications, *unless they are certain that they will not be continuing at a later stage*. If you still plan to complete a qualification but need to take a break first, that is OK, although it would be sensible to confirm your intentions with the Academic Registrar (Stephanie Gillott) first. Her direct line is 01226 704368 (email: stephgillott@oca-uk.com).

Please note that:

- credits can also be awarded through Accreditation of Prior *Experiential* learning (APEL) and/or Accreditation of Prior *Certified* Learning (APCL), provided that the prior experience and/or learning was relevant to the pathway of study selected with the OCA. This can speed up the length of time required to obtain the full qualification. Application is by submission of relevant documentation (APCL) or portfolio with commentary and examples of work (APEL). This is a technical area and students interested in looking further into this are urged to read the APL Guide⁵;
- credits can only be awarded *once* for each module completed. Thus for example, credits awarded from the same course module cannot be used for *both* a Diploma *and* a Degree;
- there are rules applying to the sequence in which you take the various course modules. Some of these are set out in subsequent sections of this chapter, but if you have any specific queries, please seek advice from the Operations Team on 0800 731 2116 (email: enquiries@oca-uk.com).

Course modules

Course modules are offered in 7 main subject groupings, namely:

- Fine Art, including Drawing, Painting, Sculpture and Printmaking;
- Art History
- Textiles;
- Photography;
- Visual Communications, including Graphic Design and Illustration;
- Creative Writing;
- Music.

⁵ This is available online at <http://www.oca-uk.com/data/files/apl-guidance-notes.pdf> or can be ordered from the Operations Team on 0800 731 2116 (email: enquiries@oca-uk.com).

There are just under 50 course modules in all, although the precise list varies from month to month as older courses are phased out and new ones are commissioned and launched. The main OCA website is the best place to check on the current availability of course modules (www.oca-uk.com).

The course materials are practically-based and set out clear programmes of work. The assignments progressively develop technical expertise and stimulate critical awareness. However, at Level 3 (HE6), course materials play a less important role, as students at this stage work more independently on work programmes negotiated with their tutor.

Degree pathways in outline

Some of our students are intending to study one or more course modules only, out of personal interest; others have longer term plans to obtain a qualification.

Currently, the OCA offers five full degrees, namely:

- BA (Hons) in Creative Arts;
- BA (Hons) in Painting;
- BA (Hons) in Photography;
- BA (Hons) in Creative Writing
- BA (Hons) in Textiles.

A sixth (Visual Communications) is planned to be introduced during 2012.

Each degree has a defined pathway, in terms of the course modules to be taken at each level. The following tables summarise the current requirements and options.

There is greater flexibility with the degree in Creative Arts, where there is scope to do some *mixing and matching*; even here, however, the basic principle is that you have to have studied a relevant course module at the lower level before enrolling for a module at Level 2 (HE5) or Level 3 (HE6).

BA (Hons) Creative Arts

| Code | Module Title | Credits |
|--|--|------------|
| Level 1 (HE 4) Any three modules from the following | | |
| OA482CA | Writing 1: Writing Skills | (40) |
| OA484CA | Writing 1: Art of Poetry | (40) |
| OA485CA | Writing 1: Narrative and Dialogue | (40) |
| OA116 | Music 1: Composing Music | (40) |
| OA431CA | Music 1: From Present to Past | (40) |
| OA451CA | Digital Film Production: Creative Concepts | (40) |
| OA452CA | Photography 1: Art of Photography | (40) |
| OA453CA | Photography 1: People and Place | (40) |
| OA454CA | Photography 1: Digital Photographic Practice | (40) |
| OA461CA | Drawing 1: Drawing Skills | (40) |
| OA462CA | Painting 1: The Practice of Painting | (40) |
| OA463CA | Painting 1: Watercolour Practice | (40) |
| OA464CA | Printmaking 1: Introduction to Printmaking | (40) |
| OA465CA | Sculpture 1: Starting out in 3D | (40) |
| OA466CA | Illustration 1: Key Steps in Illustration | (40) |
| OA441CA | Graphic Design 1: Core concepts | (40) |
| OA472CA | Textiles 1: A Creative Approach | (40) |
| OA471CA | Textiles 1: Exploring Ideas | (40) |
| OA491CA | Understanding Art 1: Western Art | (40) |
| OA492CA | Visual Studies 1: Understanding Visual Culture | (40) |
| Credits | | 120 |

| | | |
|----------------------|---|------------|
| | | |
| Level 2 (HE5) | Two modules from the following: | |
| OA582CA | Writing 2: Writing for Children | (60) |
| OA584CA | Writing 2: Storylines | (60) |
| OA585CA | Writing 2: Poetry – Form and Experience | (60) |
| OA586CA | Writing 2: Life Writing | (60) |
| OA216 | Music 2: Moving on with Composition | (60) |
| OA551CA | Photography 2: Landscape | (60) |
| OA552CA | Photography 2: Social Documentary | (60) |
| OA553CA | Photography 2: Progressing with Digital Photography | (60) |
| OA561CA | Painting 2: Exploring Concepts | (60) |
| OA564CA | Painting 2: Mixed Media | (60) |
| OA218 | Printmaking 2: Developing your style | (60) |
| OA203 | Sculpture 2: Developing Autonomy | (60) |
| OA571CA | Textiles 2: Developing Creative Textiles | (60) |
| OA572CA | Textiles 2: Contemporary Practice | (60) |
| OA563CA | Understanding Art 2: Pathways into Specialism | (60) |
| | Credits | 120 |
| | | |
| Level 3 (HE6) | Two modules from the following: | |
| OA681CA | Writing 3: Your Own Portfolio | (60) |
| OA682CA | Writing 3: Advanced | (60) |
| OA314 | Composing Music 3: Advanced | (60) |
| OA651CA | Photography 3: Your Own Portfolio | (60) |
| OA652CA | Photography 3: Advanced | (60) |
| OA661CA | Painting 3: Your Own Portfolio | (60) |
| OA662CA | Painting 3: Advanced | (60) |
| OA315 | Printmaking 3: Studio Practice | (60) |
| OA302 | Sculpture 3: Advanced | (60) |
| OA672CA | Textiles 3: Advanced | (60) |
| OA671CA | Textiles 3: Your Own Portfolio | (60) |
| OA691CA | Art History 3: Advanced | (60) |
| | Credits | 120 |
| | | |
| | Total credits | 360 |

BA Hons Painting

| Code | Module Title | Credits |
|--|--|------------|
| Level 1 (HE4) Both modules listed below | | |
| OA462CA | Painting 1: The Practice of Painting | 40 |
| OA461CA | Drawing 1: Drawing Skills | 40 |
| Plus one out of the following | | |
| OA491CA | Understanding Art 1: Western Art | (40) |
| OA463CA | Painting 1: Watercolour Practice | (40) |
| OA452CA | Photography 1: The Art of Photography | (40) |
| OA4492CA | Understanding Visual Culture 1 | (40) |
| OA464CA | Printmaking 1: Introduction to Printmaking | (40) |
| OA465CA | Sculpture 1: Starting out in 3D | (40) |
| OA472CA | Textiles 1: A Creative Approach | (40) |
| OA466CA | Illustration 1 | (40) |
| Credits | | 120 |
| Level 2 (HE 5) Both modules listed below, in either order | | |
| OA561CA | Painting 2: Exploring Concepts | 60 |
| OA564CA | Painting 2: Mixed Media | 60 |
| Credits | | 120 |
| Level 3 (HE6) Both modules listed below, in either order: | | |
| OA661CA | Painting 3: Your Own Portfolio | 60 |
| OA662CA | Painting 3: Advanced | 60 |
| Credits | | 120 |
| Total credits | | 360 |

BA Hons Photography

| Code | Module Title | Credits |
|---|---|------------|
| Level 1 (HE4) Choose either two or three modules from the modules listed below. | | |
| OA452CA | Photography 1: The Art of Photography* | (40) |
| OA453CA | Photography 1: People and Place | (40) |
| OA454CA | Photography 1: Digital Photographic Practice | (40) |
| If you have chosen only two course modules from the above, choose one from the following options. | | |
| OA491CA | Understanding Art 1: Western Art | (40) |
| OA492CA | Understanding Visual Culture 1 | (40) |
| OA451CA | Digital Film Production: Creative Concepts | (40) |
| | Credits | 120 |
| Level 2 (HE5) Choose two out of the three modules below: | | |
| OA551CA | Photography 2: Landscape | (60) |
| OA552CA | Photography 2: Social Documentary | (60) |
| OA553CA | Photography 2: Progressing with Digital Photography | (60) |
| | Credits | 120 |
| Level 3 (HE6) Both modules listed below: | | |
| OA651CA | Photography 3: Your Own Portfolio | 60 |
| OA652CA | Photography 3: Advanced | 60 |
| | Credits | 120 |
| | | |
| | Total credits | 360 |

BA Hons Creative Writing

| Code | Module Title | Credits |
|---|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Level 1 (HE4) | | |
| OA482CA | Writing 1: Writing Skills | 40 |
| OA484CA | Writing 1: Art of Poetry | 40 |
| OA485CA | Writing 1: Narrative and Dialogue | 40 |
| | Credits | 120 |
| Level 2 (HE5) Choose two out of the four modules below: | | |
| OA586CA | Writing 2: Life Writing | (60) |
| OA582CA | Writing 2: Writing for Children | (60) |
| OA584CA | Writing 2: Storylines | (60) |
| OA585CA | Writing 2: Poetry - Form and Freedom | (60) |
| | Credits | 120 |
| Level 3 (HE6) Both of the following modules: | | |
| OA681CA | Writing 3: Your Own Portfolio | 60 |
| OA682CA | Writing 3: Advanced | 60 |
| | Credits | 120 |
| | | |
| | Total credits | 360 |

BA Hons Textiles

| Code | Module Title | Credits |
|---|--|------------|
| Level 1 (HE4) Both of the following modules: | | |
| OA471CA | Textiles 1: Exploring Ideas | 40 |
| OA472CA | Textiles 1: A Creative Approach | 40 |
| Plus one of the options below | | |
| OA461CA | Drawing 1: Drawing Skills | (40) |
| OA462CA | Painting 1: The Practice of Painting | (40) |
| OA463CA | Painting 1: Watercolour Practice | (40) |
| OA464CA | Printmaking 1: Introduction to Printmaking | (40) |
| OA491CA | Understanding Art 1: Western Art | (40) |
| | Credits | 120 |
| Level 2 (HE5) Both of the following modules: | | |
| OA571CA | Textiles 2: Developing Creative Textiles | 60 |
| OA572CA | Textiles 2: Contemporary Practice | 60 |
| | Credits | 120 |
| Level 3 (HE6) Both of the following modules: | | |
| OA671CA | Textiles 3: Your Own Portfolio | 60 |
| OA672CA | Textiles 3: Advanced | 60 |
| | Credits | 120 |
| | Total credits | 360 |

If you are planning to study for a full degree, you are strongly urged to consult the relevant degree handbook. These are available on the web⁶ and can also be made available on request in hard copies (contact the Operations Team on 0800 731 2116 or by email at enquiries@oca-uk.com).

Validating universities

All OCA undergraduate units are currently validated by Buckinghamshire New University. The Memorandum of Academic Co-operation runs for the period from 1st September 2007 to 31st August 2012.

Prior to the current arrangements (in the period from 2001 to 2007/8), all OCA courses were validated by the University of Glamorgan; and, prior to this, by Thames Valley University.

The MA in Fine Art, introduced in 2011, is validated by the University for the Creative Arts.

Quality Assurance

The OCA has robust quality assurance processes in place to ensure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided to students to help them develop and to achieve their goals.

⁶ For Creative Arts go to: <http://www.oca-uk.com/data/files/ba-hons-creative-arts-handbook.pdf>
for Painting, go to: http://www.oca-uk.com/data/useful_documents/painting-degree-handbook-3.pdf
for Photography, go to: http://www.oca-uk.com/data/useful_documents/photography-degree-handbook-5.pdf;
for Creative Writing, go to: <http://www.oca-uk.com/data/files/creative-writing-degree-booklet.pdf>
for Textiles, go to: <http://www.oca-uk.com/data/files/ba-hons-textiles-degree-handbook.pdf>

Within the OCA, our provision is monitored on an ongoing basis to enhance quality and standards. Consideration is given to:

- external examiners' reports;
- key statistics, including data on retention and achievement;
- student evaluation, both informal and formal;
- feedback from the student representative(s);
- feedback from tutors.

The OCA reviews the performance of tutors in relation to teaching and professional conduct, and runs annual training days on aspects of teaching and assessment relevant to the course modules.

In addition, OCA courses and tutors are subject to the quality assurance procedures of our accrediting universities – Buckinghamshire New University and the University for the Creative Arts. This involves validation and periodic review to ensure standards are at an appropriate level and are at a broadly similar level to other UK HE institutions.

4: THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND VOICE

Chapter 1 noted that partnership working is the theme which underpins all that we do. It also referred to the Partnership Statement, to be drafted jointly by the OCA and the Student Association which will set out the rights and responsibilities of both parties. This chapter will include that document, when completed, and also provides information on student participation and consultation.

The sections are headed:

- Student Association
- Partnership Statement
- Peer support via web forums
- Feedback via surveys
- Compliments and complaints

Student Association

The formal voice of the student body is through the Student Association. This was first established in 2011 and is in process of being fully developed.

Details of the constitution, activities and ways of getting involved will be added here as soon as they become available. Meanwhile, regular updates on progress are also posted on the OCA blog (<http://www.weareoca.com/>) and in the weekly e-bulletin.

Partnership Statement

The Partnership Statement will set out the rights and responsibilities of the OCA and of students. It will be developed jointly by the OCA and the Student Association (OCASA).

Peer support via web forums

Learning from home can sometimes feel like a lonely experience, although it has many other benefits, of course. It is important to stress, therefore, that students can and do support each other, share experiences and canvas views - through becoming an active participant in the student website.

The oca-student.com website contains a number of facilities designed both to assist you in your studies with OCA and also to make it an enjoyable and social experience. The student site contains a number of forums where you can initiate, or participate in, debates. There is also the facility to upload images of your work, which fellow students can comment upon, thereby providing peer support.

A number of other resources are also available through the student site in the form of videos, media files and booklets, some of which are integral to your study, whilst others provide additional help and support to supplement your studies with OCA.

Detailed information on the facilities is available in the OCA Website Guide on the student website (see: <http://oca-student.com/node/55492>).

Feedback via surveys

One way in which we canvas student views on a more formal basis is by sending out periodic questionnaires e.g. shortly after enrolment and on completion (or non-completion). These provide us with a means of canvassing views on key points, such as the responsiveness of tutors or feedback on the course materials. We especially ask students to play their part by completing these surveys.

We can give an unequivocal guarantee that:

- the information as supplied by respondents is read and acted upon;
- data from these surveys is reported to the Executive on a quarterly basis and to the Trustees on an annual basis;
- no individuals are named in the reports, so anonymity can be assured.

Whilst the surveys are a good way of feeding back general views, please do not wait until you are sent a questionnaire if you have a compliment or complaint that needs more urgent attention.

Compliments and complaints

The Partnership Statement will make it clear that both students and the OCA have both *rights* and *responsibilities*. Thus, if either party feels that something is just not working, they have a clear duty to raise their concerns in a professional way.

We therefore expect that:

- any concerns will be voiced *at an early stage*. There is no point in leaving an unsatisfactory situation unresolved;
- concerns will be expressed *diplomatically*. We all respond more positively when problems are stated in a non-confrontational way;
- concerns will be raised *at the lowest appropriate level* before being escalated. Often the other party is not aware of the implications of their actions or statements. It's only legitimate to take extreme action immediately if the nature of the complaint is very serious or if the opportunity to put matters right informally has not been taken.

The usual route would be to have a word with your tutor first and, if the matter is not resolved satisfactorily, to speak to an adviser at Head Office on 0800 731 2116. It's only if both routes have been exhausted that we would recommend students go through the formal complaints procedure. This is set out in full in the Student Regulations.

Please note that precisely the same principles apply to the OCA in its dealings with students. Thus, if we have concerns – for example about the way in which students are interacting with tutors or Head Office staff – we will point these out diplomatically at an early time; in extreme cases, we reserve the right to withdraw tutor support.

5: FEES, TERMS AND CONDITIONS

This final chapter provides more information on student fees, conditions of enrolment, potential sources of financial support and other aspects of 'the small print'.

The sections are headed:

- Fees, discounts and supplements
- Paying by instalments
- Failure to make payments due
- Direct debit guarantee
- Money back guarantee
- Refunds
- Deferrals and extensions
- Student Finance England/Wales/Northern Ireland
- Learner Support scheme
- Other (non-OCA) sources of funding
- Student Card

More details on several of these points are set out in the Conditions of Enrolment. These are sent to all students at the time of enrolment and are also included in the Student Regulations.

Fees, discounts and supplements

In the period up to the end of June 2012, fees for open learning course modules are as follows.

- all Level 1 (HE4) course modules (40 credits) are priced at £625, including course materials, tutor support and assessment;
- all Level 2 (HE5) course modules (60 credits) are priced at £745, including course materials, tutor support and assessment;
- all Level 3 (HE6) course modules (60 credit) are priced at £745, including course materials, tutor support and assessment.

For students starting the MA in February 2012, the annual fee will be £1,900; the MA is a 4 year part-time course.

Discounts

For students paying for a complete undergraduate Level in advance, there is a 5% discount, as follows:

- Level 1 (HE4) – 3 course modules, discounted to £1,780;
- Level 2 (HE5) – 2 course modules, discounted to £1,415;
- Level 3 (HE6) – 2 course modules, discounted to £1,415.

Where students have paid for a full Level in advance but withdraw before starting a second or third course module, a full refund is payable for the courses which have not been started. This is subject to:

- the materials for the pre-paid second or third course module not having been issued – or being returned in perfect condition at the student's expense;
- contact not having been made with the tutor for the pre-paid second or third course module.

In the event that prices have risen in the intervening period, refunds for pre-paid second and third course modules will be made pro rata to the original price paid, not the price prevailing on the day of the refund.

Face to face tutor feedback

For some course modules, tutors are available to provide face to face feedback – as opposed to the normal pattern of providing feedback by email (or, exceptionally, by post). *We cannot guarantee this option*; much depends on where you live and the availability of tutors within a reasonable travelling distance.

As our costs are a little higher for face to face feedback, we charge a supplement (currently £50) over the price of the course module for open learning students.

Students from outside the UK

The course supplements for students studying outside the UK is currently (July 2011) £100 for students in Europe and £150 for students outside of Europe.

Paying by instalments

Paying by instalments is a good way of spreading the burden if students cannot pay the full price up front. The instalment prices incorporate a small administration fee (currently £35) but remain excellent value for money:

- for students on Level 1 (HE4) course modules, the deposit is £285, with five monthly instalments of £75;
- for Level 2 (HE5) and Level 3 (HE6) course modules the deposit is £330, with six monthly instalments of £75.

The face to face supplement, where applicable, is payable with the deposit.

If you have a UK bank account we will send you a Direct Debit Mandate form to complete and return to us. Otherwise your monthly instalments should be paid by credit card, cheque or bank transfer.

Failure to make payments due

If you have difficulty meeting your payments, it is essential that you contact us immediately. We always try hard to find a way to resolve any difficulties that may arise.

However, if students default on their payments and do not keep us in the picture, we reluctantly pass the case on to our debt collection agency. The costs of recovering the fees owed to us will be added to the outstanding account.

It is important to stress that we are an arts education charity – not a profit making institution. Any money owed to us, therefore, has a negative impact on our ability to develop new courses and assist those with genuine hardships through the Learner Support Scheme.

Direct debit guarantee

Instalment payments made to the OCA are covered by the Direct Debit Guarantee. This guarantee is offered by all banks and building societies that take part in the direct debit scheme. The efficiency and security of the scheme is monitored and protected by your own bank or building society.

If the amounts to be paid or the payment dates change, the OCA will notify you 14 working days in advance of your account being debited, or as otherwise agreed.

If an error is made by the OCA or your bank or building society, you are guaranteed a full and immediate refund from your branch of the amount paid.

You can cancel a direct debit at any time by writing to your bank or building society. Please send a copy of the letter to us.

Money back guarantee

If the OCA materials do not meet your requirements, the OCA will refund your payment in full, or credit your account, provided that the materials arrive at the OCA in perfect condition. The package must be returned in full, securely packed, by recorded delivery to arrive at the OCA within 14 days of the day you received it.

The conditions applying to the money back guarantee are slightly different for non-EU students in order to take into account lengthier postal delivery timescales; see the Conditions of Enrolment for the detailed information.

Refunds

Once you have enrolled - and after the 14 days have elapsed - the materials belong to you and are non-refundable.

There is a further window – after the 14 days have elapsed but within 30 days of receipt of course materials – during which the OCA will still consider making a *partial* refund. The amount to be refunded depends on the level of the course but is calculated on the basis of the OCA charging for the course materials, distribution costs, up front fee for the tutor, and administrative costs – but refunding the balance.

Decisions on refunds are taken in the first instance by the Head of Operations. Students have a right of appeal to the Chief Executive, whose decision is final.

The full conditions of enrolment are set out on the web and in the Student Regulations.

Deferrals and extensions

Students are allowed a maximum of two years to complete each course module, although in practice, most take a lot less than this.

Occasionally students experience problems during the two year period (e.g. as a result of illness or carer responsibilities). In situations like this, OCA is usually willing to grant a deferral (effectively putting the course 'on hold' so that the counting of the time period is suspended for a defined period) – or, if the period is coming to an end, to grant an extension (i.e. extend the deadline). In all such cases it is essential to speak to an adviser at Head Office as soon as possible (on 0800 731 2116), giving a brief outline of the circumstances.

Please note that extensions are not normally awarded in situations where the student has not completed three or more assignments; in short, we expect the student to have demonstrated commitment to the course first. If a retrospective application is made, written evidence would be required (e.g. a doctor's letter).

Decisions on deferrals and extensions are taken in the first instance by the Head of Operations. There is a right of appeal to the Chief Executive, whose decision is final.

If students are committed to a full degree course and are receiving funding from Student Finance England (or Wales or Northern Ireland) they have to complete the degree programme within 6 years of the first enrolment under the terms of the funding scheme. If they fall behind schedule, it is essential that they contact OCA immediately.

The policy on deferrals and extensions is set out in the Student Regulations.

Student Finance England/Wales/Northern Ireland

If you are resident in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, you may be eligible to claim Fee and Course Grants for degree courses (Creative Arts, Painting, Photography, Creative Writing, or Textiles) from Student Finance England or their equivalent in other UK countries, *other than Scotland*.

Please note that funding is not available for personal development learners undertaking single modules – but see the information on the Learner Support Scheme below.

What type of funding is on offer?

The funding made available by these arrangements is an award, not a loan - hence does not have to be re-paid. There are two elements to the grant, namely:

- the Fee Grant - to help with course fees;
- the Course Grant - to help with associated costs such as books, materials and travel.

Who is eligible?

Students must live in defined parts of the UK (see next section) and must not already hold a degree.

Eligibility depends on being registered on a full degree (i.e. BA Hons). Simply registering for a single OCA course module - or even a level - will not be sufficient.

In order to qualify for support, part-time HE courses must not take more than twice as long as the equivalent full-time course to complete. Thus OCA students claiming Student Finance grants would have to complete their degree courses *within 6 years*. This does put a constraint on the OCA's general position, which is that students have up to two years to complete each course module.

Does it matter where I live in the UK?

Yes, it does. Thus far, OCA has acquired Specific Designation status from Student Finance England, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, due to the different funding arrangements for HE in Scotland, OCA students there are (sadly) not eligible.

How much grant funding might I receive?

As funding is means tested, the actual amount awarded is based on individual circumstances. In very general terms, where the household income is less than £16,845, both a Fee Grant and a Course Grant would probably be payable. At the other extreme, where household income is higher than £28,066, neither grant would be payable at all. There are several steps between these two positions, however. And it's important to bear in mind that students will still be responsible for meeting the balance between the grant awarded and the OCA fees for the course module.

Our understanding is that, where students are living with a partner, the partner's income *is* taken into account; however, where students are living at home with their parents, parental income is *not* part of the calculation. Please note that all funding decisions are taken by SFE, SFNI and SFW - but not by OCA.

The respective websites contain information on how the funding is assessed, so please look there first if you think you might be eligible:

- for England:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/Applyfortheirstime/DG_171529

- for Wales:

http://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=56,1274359&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

- for Northern Ireland:

http://www.studentfinancenir.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=54,1265897&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

Learner Support scheme

Despite not receiving any state funding, the OCA Trustees have set aside an annual sum to be allocated through a Learner Support Scheme. The scheme's objective is to widen participation and engagement in our courses and other activities by those who would otherwise face barriers to being an OCA student.

The new Learner Support Scheme will be launched during Autumn 2011 and will take over from the previous Bursary Scheme. The details have not yet been finalised but it is anticipated that the scheme will include the following components:

- bursaries towards course fees. This will be similar to the former Bursary Scheme and will provide assistance towards course fees for personal development learners in defined situations (mainly in financial hardship and/or with a medical condition or disability);
- funding towards materials/equipment required to undertake an OCA course (e.g. for learners in custodial institutions);
- funding towards postal costs to submit work to a tutor or for assessment (e.g. where a student has to send heavy items but is in financial hardship);
- funding to enable participation in OCA-led trips (e.g. to cover the cost of disability assistance where this is not available from the venue);
- funding to assist non-native speakers of English (e.g. to make available text books on study skills);
- pilots or projects proposed by student(s) or external individual(s)/organisation (e.g. projects to encourage participation in arts education by people who would otherwise find this difficult to access);
- awards to recognise student achievement/commitment where a student has been disadvantaged by circumstances;
- funding towards developmental work/research to improve learner support (e.g. extending our information resources regarding external sources of funding and support).

Further details will be published on the OCA website as soon as they become available.

Other (non-OCA) sources of funding

We only have a working knowledge of other *potential* funding sources. In practice, your best bet would be to contact the (free) Next Step Service on 0800 100 900. The relevant page on their website is <https://nextstep.direct.gov.uk/HelpAdviceandMoney/Pages/default.aspx>. They also have an email service (links on the same web page).

There are also briefing materials from other agencies, such as NIACE (the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education). See, for example:

http://archive.niace.org.uk/information/Briefing_sheets/83-Sources-of-funding-for-adult-learning.pdf

Student Card

Once you are enrolled on an OCA course you will receive an OCA Student Card. This card may be accepted by retailers and organisations that offer student discount.

Will I receive a NUS (National Union of Students) card?

The OCA is registered as an educational provider with the NUS. Membership of the NUS is optional. UK Students who register with the NUS will be entitled to purchase the NUS Extra Card. This is the definitive student discount card which can be used to show membership when required. With an NUS Extra Card you can take advantage of a range of exclusive discounts, offers and competitions designed to make student life more exciting, more memorable and more rewarding. To register with NUS and to purchase the NUS Extra Card please go to <http://www.nus.org.uk/en/>