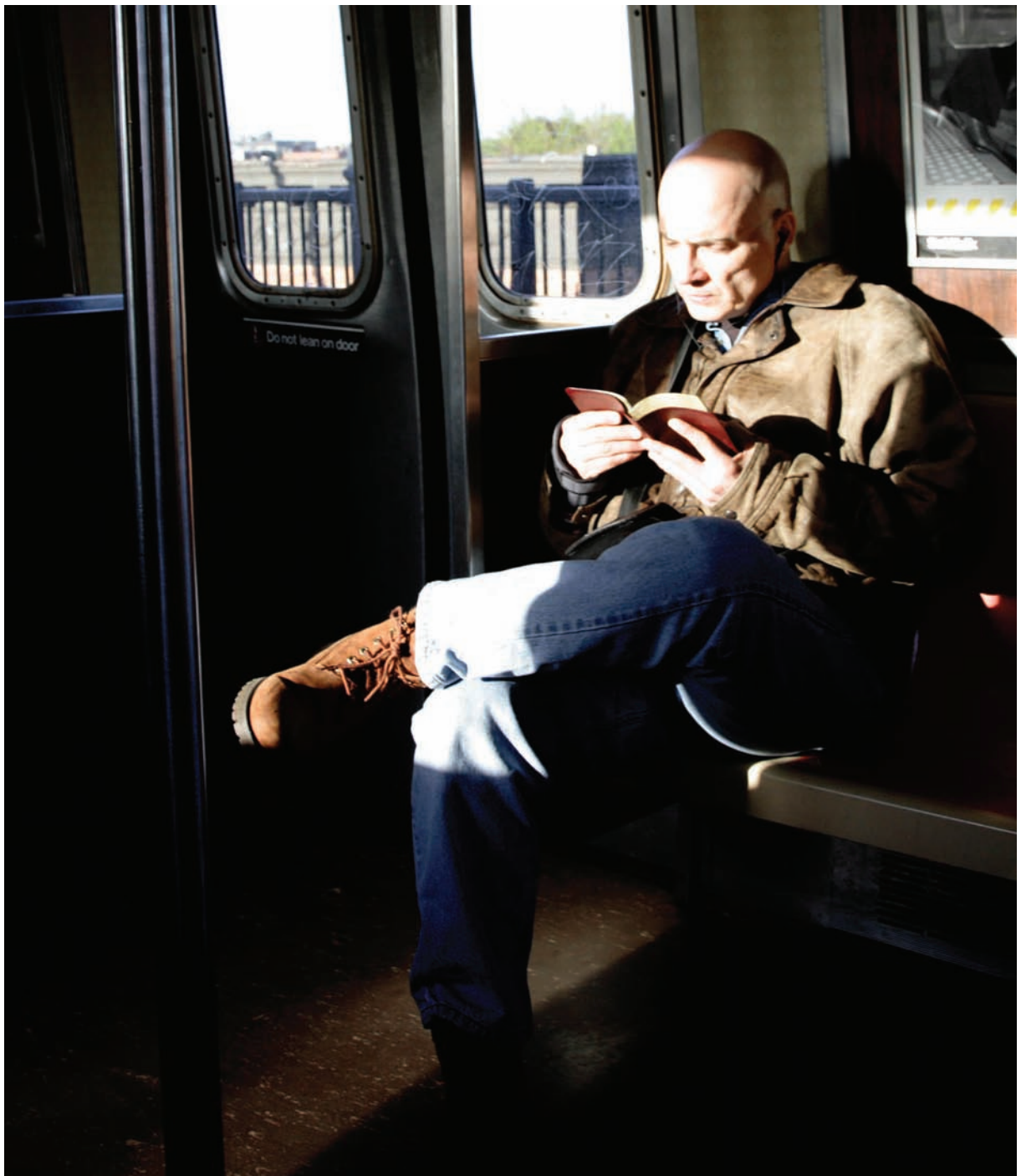


Open College of the Arts

Student Handbook



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Welcome to OCA

Welcome to the Open College of the Arts. Whether you have been an OCA student before or this is the first time you've studied with us, we hope you'll find it stimulating and enjoyable.

OCA isn't just a college, it's a unique community of artists, musicians and writers in training and creative professionals. Our courses provide a framework for learning, but because our tutor/student ratio is lower than traditional Higher Education (HE) courses, the relationship between tutor and student develops in a way that uniquely meets the student's individual aspirations. You can benefit from the experiences of other students, too, by coming to one of our events or exhibitions, chatting to other students online or viewing their work on our website www.oca-uk.com/portfolio.

About this handbook

This handbook is your road atlas for the journey ahead. It gives you an overview of how your OCA course will work for you. Throughout there are signposts to further sources of information on the OCA website or in one of our study guides (see below). Don't feel that you have to read every word of the handbook but skim through it and then keep it handy so you can refer to it if you have any queries or problems.

*If you think that you may want your work to be formally assessed, please read the section entitled **Assessment**.*

Note: There are references to forms to download throughout this guide. If you don't have access to the internet and need a specific form, call the OCA on 0800 731 2116 to request a paper copy by post.

OCA study guides

Our study guides are for you to use alongside this handbook and your course materials, to give you comprehensive and accessible information about all aspects of your course. Most of the guides cover general topics relevant to all students; one or two relate to particular courses of study. We send you the guides that are relevant to your course but you can also download any or all of the study guides from www.oca-uk.com/courses/documents

OCA's current study guides are:

Study skills

Keeping sketchbooks and learning logs

Assessment and how to get qualified

Looking at other artists

OCA website guide

OCA camera equipment guide

APL guidance notes

Further study guides are in plan, so keep an eye on the OCA website for additions to this series.

There is also a series of **information sheets** on the website. These give you key information on specific topics not covered by the study guides.

About OCA

What OCA offers you as a student

Our mission is to widen access to creative arts education up to graduate level through open and flexible learning. The aim of all our courses is to give you practical skills and knowledge, to develop confidence in your own creativity and to help you to understand the work of other practitioners. All our students are equally important to us and you'll receive exactly the same support whether you're studying for a qualification or simply for leisure. OCA tutors are practising professionals so you're part of a unique community working together in a common enterprise.

How OCA is run

OCA is overseen by a Board of Trustees drawn from business, education and the arts, whose job is to ensure that OCA has a sound academic base, fulfils its commitment to students and survives financially. Although we apply for and receive generous grants from a variety of sources, we do not receive direct support from the government and the greater part of our annual income derives from student fees. OCA is a charitable trust, so any surplus is directed straight back into the organisation.

Academic standards are overseen by our Teaching and Learning Committee, which reports to the Board of Trustees on matters like course development, assessment and links with the formal education sector.

Our courses and students

We offer a choice of over 40 courses from six schools (art history; creative writing; fine art; music; photography, film & digital media, and textiles). Over 2,000 students enrol with us each year and to date we have supported over 50,000 students. We currently have around 150 tutors, all of whom are experienced teachers as well as being practising artists.

Our headquarters

OCA is directed by Gareth Dent from our base in the north of England. All administration, warehousing and dispatch is carried out from this base.

We have our own gallery space with facilities for workshops and exhibitions and we run an active programme of events. We'll keep you informed of any activity that might interest you so keep an eye on the website. If you'd like to hire the space yourself, please contact us.

Our full postal address is:

OCA
The Michael Young Arts Centre
Unit 1B, Redbrook Business Park
Wilthorpe Road
Barnsley S75 1JN.

You can call us free on 0800 731 2116 (Mon–Thurs 9–5, Fri 9–4) or if calling from overseas +44 800 731 2116.

Email enquiries@oca-uk.com.

Links with Bucks New University

All our courses are accredited, which means that you can count them towards a Certificate or Diploma in Higher Education or a BA Hons in Creative Arts. Our courses are accredited through Bucks New University, one of the UK's newest universities. Find out more about our accrediting university from the OCA website www.oca-uk.com or from the Bucks New University website www.bucks.ac.uk.

Who's who at OCA

Your tutor is your principal point of contact with OCA (see page 17). At some stage during your course, though, you may have to contact the administrative team at OCA. Use the freephone number: 0800 731 2116. Below is a list of some of the key contact staff and the areas they can help you with:

- registration and tutor queries – **Debbie Hodson**
- course materials, courier queries and to change your contact details – **Kathy Petts** or **Graham Ashton**
- OCA website – **Paul Vincent**
- assessment queries – **Jade Lees**
- accreditation, credit transfer and APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) – **Stephanie Gillott**
- course deferrals and transfers – **Adele Fitzpatrick**
- bursary applications – **Emma Mason**
- individual needs – **Emma Mason**
- complaints – **Lee Openshaw**.

The OCA website

Our website will tell you just about everything you need to know during your time with OCA, from course details to the assessment and accreditation process to applying for financial help. All the forms, study guides and information sheets mentioned in this handbook can be downloaded from the website. You can also use the website to find out about forthcoming events, browse members' portfolios in our online gallery and explore resources to help you with your course.

One of the benefits of studying is the support you can get from other students. You need not feel cut off from this support just because you're studying at home. Our online forum lets you chat to other people in the OCA community, both students and staff, whenever you want to. Many of our students really enjoy and learn from talking to each other. We keep a close eye on the forum so that we know what our students are thinking and feeling and we try our best to act on your comments.

You can use the website to keep your learning log as a 'blog' or online diary, if you like the idea of working like this. You can then create links to different websites and show images as well as writing your reflections as you study. Keeping a blog makes it easy for your tutor to

keep track of your learning log without having to post or email it – and for you to share thoughts and ideas with other OCA students.

To find out how to get the most out of the OCA website, read the [OCA website guide](#).

The OCA bursary fund

At OCA we believe that education in the arts should be as widely available as possible. Our trustees have established a bursary fund to help with the cost of course fees. If you're on a low household income, are unemployed, disabled or a carer, and have a serious commitment to learning, you may be eligible. (The bursary fund is for a contribution to course fees but does not cover the cost of course materials or any other associated costs.) This fund is available for both new and continuing students. Each application is considered strictly on its own merits.

If you think you might be eligible, download an [OCA bursary form](#) from the OCA website or ring Academic Services free on 0800 731 2116 and they'll send you a copy. To support your claim, you'll need to send us:

- proof of low income
- copies of some of your work (please do not send originals).

For more information, read the [Bursary guidance](#) document on the website. The website also has information on [other discounts](#) available to OCA students.

If studying with the OCA has been a valuable experience for you and you'd like to help other people to share this experience, we hope you might consider making a contribution to the OCA bursary fund. Ring Academic Services on 0800 731 2116 for further advice on how you can do this.

If you have any questions

We make every effort to ensure that you have all the information you need, but if you're unclear about anything don't hesitate to contact OCA or your tutor. If you have a problem, it's really important that you contact us as soon as possible to tell us about it so that we can try to sort it out for you – if we don't know about it, we can't help.

Your tutor is there to help and advise you but remember that your tutor has a day job too. Please be considerate about when you call and how often you call.

If you need more help, or advice about administration, ring the Head Office. Academic Services are there to answer your questions. You will need your student number when you call so we can answer your query as quickly as possible.

You can contact Academic Services at:

OCA

The Michael Young Arts Centre
Unit 1B, Redbrook Business Park
Wilthorpe Road
Barnsley
South Yorkshire S75 1JN

Phone: 01226 730 495

Email: enquiries@oca-uk.com

Website: www.oca-uk.com

Office hours are 9–5 Monday to Thursday and 9–4 Friday.

There is an answerphone for messages outside these hours and when staff are unavailable.

Our Equality and Diversity policy

OCA is fully committed to equal opportunities. Everyone enrolling on a course will be treated with equal consideration by staff and tutors irrespective of race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, appearance, age or marital status.

If you have individual needs

If you have a disability, illness or specific needs such as dyslexia, sight impairment, or if you spend a substantial amount of time caring for someone, it may be helpful to let your tutor know so he or she is aware of your needs and can support you. You can do this through the student profile. If you find it difficult to get in touch with your tutor, contact Academic Services.

Please also take the time to download and fill in the **Individual needs information** form on our website, and return it to us at Head Office. If we know about your needs, we can try to help. If you have difficulty filling in the form, please contact us.

Alternatively, send Academic Services a short letter explaining your circumstances. Information you provide will be in confidence and only passed on to your tutor with your permission.

OCA Environmental Policy

OCA recognises its responsibility towards the protection of the environment. OCA aims to promote an understanding of environmental issues in the context of its business operation and continually improve the environmental impact of its business. OCA welcomes feedback on environmental issues relating to its business and will take measures to respond where appropriate and feasible.

Making the most of your course

Study with OCA is described as 'supported open learning' or 'distance learning'. Open learning means the opportunity to study in a flexible but structured way. You can:

- join a course regardless of prior qualifications or experience
- start at any time
- work at your own pace
- study at home
- study for pleasure, a career or a qualification.

'Supported' means you get feedback and advice on your course work from your tutor, help with administrative and practical issues from Academic Services and friendship and moral support from other OCA students. You can contact other students through our online forum and at the OCA exhibitions and workshops held around the country.

Studying at home

If you haven't studied for some time, or if this is the first time you've studied at home rather than in a classroom, you might be wondering if you'll be able to balance your work on the course with all your other commitments. Or if you can achieve a good enough level in your work. Or if you will be able to motivate yourself to get down to work without a fixed deadline. Feelings like these are common among open learning students. It's worth making the effort to get into good habits at the outset, learning to manage your time so that the course doesn't take over your life, and doesn't struggle to find a place in your busy routine.

Your **Study skills** booklet will help you with everything from managing your time, through using the internet, to presenting and referencing your work properly. Keep this booklet with your course materials for easy reference throughout your course.

Using the course materials

Your course is a programme of guided study, supported and supplemented by feedback from your tutor. We try to write our courses so that they can be understood by people who have never practised the arts before as well as those who already have experience in the field they have chosen to study.

A major advantage of getting all your course materials at the start of the course is that you can see the whole year's work in advance. This can be daunting, but it allows you to prepare and plan ahead – perhaps by reading a book, looking at or listening to a piece of work, or gathering materials that you'll need. It's a good idea to skim through the course as soon as the materials arrive and note down anything that you'll need to prepare for. This quick read through can also help to give you a broad feel and get you in the right frame of mind for the course.

Your course materials are your guide rather than your instruction manual. They're designed to be a working document that you can annotate and add to as you like. The materials are yours to keep at the end of the course.

What to do when you receive your course materials

As soon as you receive your course materials:

- Use the contents checklist at the start of the course pack to make sure that everything's there. If anything is missing, contact OCA by phone or email immediately.
- Make contact with your tutor by emailing or sending them your profile. This should contain information about you, your experience in the subject you are studying and anything else you consider relevant
- Check through the course materials to see if there's any preparation you need to do straightaway.
- Equip yourself with a notebook to use as your learning log and any other specific notebooks or tools required for the course.
- If you're new to distance learning, read the **Study skills** booklet and start planning how you're going to manage your time.

Assignments

For most Level 1 or Level 2 courses, you'll usually be asked to complete five assignments. These are set out in your course materials, with the number of learning hours that each assignment is expected to take and instructions for submitting work to your tutor.

Level 3 courses vary in their assignment arrangements. For example, you may be asked to submit a portfolio of work at the end of the course together with an extended written assignment.

You can scan or photograph your work and submit it by email or send the originals to your tutor by post. This is something for you to decide with your tutor. If you go for the email option, you may still need to send some original work by post.

If you decide to go for accreditation you will also need to submit some of the work you do for your assignments for formal assessment at the end of the course.

You have up to 2 years to complete your course. Within this limit, we are not prescriptive about how long a course should take because that would defeat the purpose of open learning. But keep in mind if you prolong the course for too long, you may lose the momentum you need to link your assignments effectively, and there may be additional administrative costs.

Your sketchbook, learning log and other notebooks

All OCA students must keep a learning log (music students keep a listening log) and students on visual arts courses need to keep a sketchbook. Creative writing students keep a commonplace book and writer's notebook. (You may hear the learning log referred to as a learning journal, logbook or notebook.)

Your learning log is a record of your learning. It's not just a diary of what you've done, but a record of your thoughts, reflections, plans, progress and setbacks.

Your notebooks takes your learning beyond the desk or easel and allow you to record the people and places you see in your daily life. It allows you to practise your skills, develop your awareness and give rein to your imagination beyond the confines of your course work.

Keeping up with work in your notebooks and learning log is crucial if you choose to have

your work assessed, because this work makes up 20% of your marks. Even if you don't want your work to be formally assessed, your tutor will want to see how you are developing by looking at the reflections you have logged and at your notebook work.

For more information about how to get the most out of your notebooks and learning log, read [Keeping sketchbooks and learning logs](#).

Making use of technology

Most OCA courses have their own webpage and to access these and the OCA's online services you'll need a computer with internet access. Your tutor and Academic Services will also need to contact you and this is quicker and more efficient by email than by post. If you don't have internet access at home, you'll need to set this up with a friend, or at your local library (usually free) or cybercafé (usually a small charge).

It is possible to complete most OCA courses without computer technology, but the internet has become the key research tool for most of our students because it is so convenient. For example, as well as OCA's online forums, you can easily access a whole range of library catalogues and gallery and museum collections online, as well as the work of individual artists. There are also specialist sites for printmakers, photographers, and illustrators. For music, composition software is an essential component of the courses.

Like any other source of information, the internet has to be used with care. Read [Study skills](#) for some useful tips.

The resources section of the OCA website has links to a range of art and photography websites, as well as YouTube clips. You'll need to log on to access this information. See the [OCA website guide](#).

Copyright

Copyright is an issue in particular for students who decide to blog their learning logs. Copyright law is out of step with internet use and unfortunately this means we have to advise students to be very careful when referring to and making use of others' creative work. There are educational exceptions to the UK's copyright laws but these exceptions are limited and were designed with classroom in mind. The UK government is considering revisions to the law on copyright and the OCA is lobbying for a widening of the educational exceptions to take account of distance learning. In the meantime following some simple rules should prevent you from encountering problems:

- Link to rather than download and paste images into your blog if there is any doubt about their copyright status. So, if you wanted to reference Picasso's Weeping Woman from the Tate collection do so as a link – your blog may not look as attractive, but that is not the underlying purpose.
- Do not assume that just because a work is old, it is necessarily out of copyright and you are free to use it. Copyright can subsist in newer treatments of old works. For example, Breugal's work is almost certainly out of copyright, but photographs of his work may be the copyright of the gallery which owns the paintings. Again linking is safer than pasting.
- Many people upload content to the web under Creative Commons licences – as long as you follow the rules about attributions you are free to post this material into your blog
- If you have a burning desire to use some copyrighted material, then ask the owner's permission and abide by any restrictions they impose. It is possible if you explain the purpose you will be given permission for free.
- Finally, do not assume that if you do ignore these rules you will not be detected. Copyright is a big financial issue for some and there are companies that have developed software which trawls the web for wrongly used material. The first you may know about it could be when you receive an invoice.

If you're having problems

OCA understands that our students lead busy and often complicated lives and that sometimes students have to defer studying for a while, for all sorts of reasons. If you're having problems, talk to your tutor first. You can also get advice from Academic Services by calling 0800 731 2116.

If you decide to defer, you must let us know first. See page 30 for more information.

OCA tuition arrangements

Your tutor is your main point of contact with OCA during the course. This section explains what you can expect from your tutor – and what your tutor will expect from you.

If you're a complete beginner in your chosen subject, or if you haven't done any studying for quite some time, be reassured that many of our students are in the same position. Your tutor will want to help you build up confidence and bring out the best in you. Our tutors understand that students may at times during the course have difficulty in finding time or motivation for course work and will want to encourage and support you.

Tutors are not there to instruct you in the way that teachers did at school – they are there to help you learn from your own and other people's experience. In the arts there is often no right or wrong way of doing things. It's a case of finding a way that works well for you at the particular point in your development. So don't sit back and leave it all to your tutor. Decide what you want to get from the tutorial so that you and your tutor can come up with the best way of moving forward.

And if your tutor asks you how you feel things are going, answer honestly even if you are feeling negative. Your tutor may be able to change things to suit you – or at least explain why it can't be done.

How OCA tuition works

On enrolment, Level 1 and Level 2 students are asked to choose either distance or face-to-face tuition. Level 3 students can have a combination of these; for example, you might decide to be tutored via email but with one or two face-to-face meetings at key points during the course.

The vast majority of our students choose **distance tuition**. This means that contact with your tutor is by email, post, phone, webcam or a combination of these that you agree with your tutor. Distance tuition gives you the most freedom. It also gives you written feedback and advice to review at your leisure. Phone tuition allows you to communicate directly with each other but it means arranging mutually convenient times to talk.

Face-to-face tuition involves arranging to meet your tutor at regular intervals, usually at your tutor's studio or some other suitable working space. Your five hour tutorial entitlement can be delivered in 30 minute or one hour sessions, as you decide. Usually, you'll meet your tutor one-to-one, but your tutor may suggest that you attend with other students so that you can

pool your time and increase your tutor contact. It can be very valuable to share ideas with other students but it's for you to decide what suits you best.

Whatever type of tuition you choose, you can arrange for more tutorial time if you need it by making an additional payment to OCA.

Contacting your tutor

One of the first things you need to do when your course materials arrive is to make contact with your tutor.

If you've enrolled on a Level 1 or Level 2 course, you will have been allocated a tutor. If you've chosen to receive face-to-face tuition, your allocated tutor should live within reasonable travelling distance. If you have chosen distance tuition you will need to post your work to your tutor for review, or (in agreement with your tutor) occasionally have your work reviewed online. Remember that there is no substitute for the tutor seeing the originals!

If you've enrolled on a Level 3 course, you'll have received a list of potential tutors, allowing you to choose the tutor who best meets your particular needs. If you've chosen face-to-face tuition or a combination of distance and face-to-face tuition, keep in mind how far away they are when choosing your tutor. If you're not sure which tutor to choose, contact Academic Services for advice.

Student profile

Write your profile and post or email it to your tutor to introduce yourself. In return, you'll receive a welcoming letter or email from your tutor and from there you can arrange further contact. You don't need to wait until you hear from your tutor to start your course – get going straightaway.

If your contact details change during your course, download (or ring up and request a paper copy) of the **Change of details** form and email or post copies to your tutor and to OCA.

The idea of the student profile is to give your tutor additional information about yourself, such as what you hope to gain from the course and any individual needs you might have. If you have needs that may affect your work on the course, please complete an **Individual needs information** form and return it to OCA. It is often helpful to tell your tutor something about the type of person you are and how you want to learn. Do you need deadlines to work efficiently? Do you want to get through the course as quickly as possible or do you want to take it at a slower pace?

Getting the most from your tuition

Distance tuition gives you more freedom to set your own schedule, but without the deadline of a tutorial date it can be easy to let things slide. Your tutor will suggest a date for submitting your next assignment. If you're going to miss the planned date, contact your tutor to explain the delay. Your tutor would generally prefer you take extra time to complete the work to your satisfaction but needs to know what is happening.

You can scan or photograph work to email to your tutor or send it by post, as appropriate. Your tutor will talk to you about this. Be selective about what you send. If you exceed the amount of material specified in the course, your tutor will not have time to look at it all and do it justice.

It's very helpful to your tutor if you include some background information about what you're doing. You could send a covering letter or email with your assignment – or post your learning log online as a blog so that your tutor can keep track of your journey through the course. Don't be afraid to make comments and ask questions – all of this helps your tutor to give you a useful response to your work.

Your tutor sends a copy of the tutor's report on each of your assignments to OCA so that there is a record of your progress throughout the course.

With **face-to-face tuition** at the first tutorial, your tutor will give a general introduction to the first section of the course to get you started. Look through the course before this tutorial, even if you don't have time to start any serious work. Take your course materials and a notebook with you to all tutorials. It's a good idea to make brief notes during tutorials so that you can be sure that you've picked up everything your tutor tells you.

The rest of your tutorials will probably correspond roughly with each assignment. However, not all courses have the same number of assignments, so exactly how you divide your work up between tutorials is for you and your tutor to discuss. Always try and get to your tutorial even if you haven't been able to complete the necessary work. Your tutor will understand that students work in difficult circumstances and at different paces and will be happy to agree a new schedule with you.

At tutorials you'll be asked to produce some of your work. This can be quite nerve-racking at first, especially if other students are present. If several people are attending a tutorial session, it can be useful to team up with a partner so that they can note down what the tutor is saying about your work while you're listening and talking to your tutor. Sometimes it's easy to focus on the bad points and overlook the good.

Towards the end of your course, your tutor will write a short tutor report on your progress and achievement and you should be prepared to bring in a cross-section of your work, including your learning log and sketchbook (if you have one). This applies even if you've decided not to opt for formal assessment. A copy of the tutor report will go to you and to OCA.

Getting feedback from your tutor

Think of your tutor as a 'critical friend'. OCA courses are university level courses and your tutor's role is to evaluate your work and offer constructive criticism. The feedback you receive will be generally encouraging and often positive but if your tutor's comments are sometimes critical, they are only meant to help you develop and move forward. Critical comments may be hard to deal with at first. But it's an important part of your development to take on board constructive criticism from your tutor and to begin to look at your own work with critical awareness.

Take your time to reflect on your tutor's feedback – the good and the bad – and let your tutor know what you've decided to focus on as a result. Then, at the next opportunity for feedback, your tutor will know the things you have been working especially hard on and will be able to tailor his or her remarks to these as well as to the overall picture of your work. This will help you to feel that you are moving forward and making progress.

It's important to tell your tutor at once about anything that may affect the quality of your work so that they can support you. You may have let OCA know about individual needs such as illness, disability or caring responsibilities, but it will also help your tutor to know about any temporary setbacks or problems (eg relationship breakdown, a sick child, problems at work) so that these can be taken into account.

If you are not happy with your tutor

If you genuinely feel that you cannot make progress with the tutor you have been assigned, whether because their style of feedback doesn't suit you, or you are not feeling well supported, or indeed if you have a significant personality clash, please let us know immediately. We will find you an alternative tutor.

Assessment

OCA is strongly committed to providing the same educational and tutorial support to all students whether studying for pleasure or to gain qualifications. This section is for those students who decide that they want to have their work assessed in order to gain a qualification.

*You may feel at the moment that you don't want your work to be formally assessed. If so, skip this section, but if you change your mind later in the course, please note that **you must apply for formal assessment before the course ends.***

It's worth having your work formally assessed if there's any chance that you might want to study the arts again in the future. Your learning with OCA could then be taken into account.

What's involved in formal assessment?

At the end of your course we offer:

- **A Certificate of Completion.**
- **The OCA Award.**

The **Certificate of Completion** is available to any student who has successfully undertaken all the course assignments, as evidenced by the tutor report. It will be sent to you automatically on completion of your course.

The **OCA Award** is available for most courses and is based on a formal graded assessment for which you must apply. You don't have to sit a formal exam. An independent assessor will examine your course portfolio (including your sketchbooks, notebooks and learning log) and tutor reports. If you're successful, you'll get an assessed grade (A–D) as well as be eligible to obtain credit points that can be put towards a further qualification, through OCA or from another institution.

OCA level 1 courses carry 40 Higher Education (HE4) credits

OCA level 2 courses carry 60 Higher Education (HE5) credits

OCA level 3 courses carry 60 Higher Education (HE6) credits

There's an assessment fee for each course formally assessed, unless you're enrolled on – and have paid for – a full level or whole degree course.

Applying for assessment

First, read the **Submission requirements** for your course – in the appendix at the back of your course and on the web. This will tell you exactly what you need to submit for assessment. Then talk to your tutor and/or Academic Services. The earlier you do this, the more prepared for assessment you'll be. For example, knowing that your work is going to be assessed may influence how you present your work and keep your learning log. You can also make sure that you keep your tutor reports somewhere safe.

You'll need to apply for formal assessment when you have completed your penultimate assignment for the course. This applies to all students, even if you've enrolled and paid for a full degree course in advance. You do this by downloading an **Assessment application** form from the website and returning this to OCA with your payment. Your registration cannot be accepted without payment. Once we've received your application, we'll send you details of assessment dates and deadlines.

For full details of the formal assessment process and guidance on presenting your work for assessment, see **Assessment and how to get qualified**.

Return of work

Your work will be returned to you 4 to 6 weeks after ratification of your grade. Please contact us for further information. A delivery supplement will be required if your work has to be returned to an address outside the UK:

OCA will take all precautions to keep your work safe. However, we are unable to accept responsibility for loss or damage to work submitted for formal assessment.

Assessment grades

Bear in mind that if you are assessed the percentage grades allocated may work differently to the grading systems you may have had at school.

An indication of the levels of grading used in Higher Education are:

70% reflects work of an excellent standard – equivalent to a First Class degree

40% is the pass mark.

Getting an OCA qualification

Students who wish to do so can accumulate their credit points and put them towards a qualification through our partner institution Bucks New University. OCA has a Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE), Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) and a BA Hons (Creative Arts) Degree validated. The credit requirements for each of these are summarised below.

<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Credits</i>	<i>Required OCA courses</i>
Certificate in HE	120 points at Level 1	3 Level 1 courses
Diploma in HE	120 points at Level 1 120 points at Level 2	3 Level 1 courses 2 Level 2 courses
BA Hons in Creative Arts	120 points at Level 1 120 points at Level 2 120 points at Level 3	3 Level 1 courses 2 Level 2 courses 2 Level 3 courses

Planning your qualification pathway

If you do decide to go for a degree, you'll be expected to plan a coherent qualification pathway. This doesn't mean that you can't 'pick and mix' subjects in a range of different areas, but it does mean that you have to fulfil certain prerequisites for moving on to study a subject at Level 2 and Level 3:

Level 2: To progress to Level 2 in any subject (eg photography), you must have studied that subject at Level 1.

Level 3: To progress to Level 3 in any subject you must have studied that subject at Level 2 or be able to demonstrate that you have prior learning that OCA judges has prepared you sufficiently for level 3 tuition.

You don't have to get the prescribed number of credit points at a particular level provided that you 'top up' with credit points from a course at a higher level. So, for example, some of

our photography students take two Level 1 courses (80 points in total) then take all three Level 2 photography courses to make up the 40 point deficiency at Level 1.

You can decide to work towards a qualification at any point in your studies, but you may need to go back and fill in any gaps in your qualification pathway.

If you decide that you want to progress to a qualification when you first enrol with OCA, call Academic Services free on 0800 731 2116 for help with planning your qualification pathway. This doesn't mean that you have to decide at the outset what courses you want to do at Level 3; it simply means that we can help you to keep a coherent pathway open at Levels 1 and 2.

For further information, read the **Degree pathways** information sheet on the website.

Getting a qualification from another institution

Under the National Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme, you can approach any educational institution within the formal education sector if you want to study with them and want your OCA credit points to count towards a degree or other qualification. This is done through a process called Accreditation of Prior Certified Learning (APCL)

Credit points issued by one institution don't necessarily convert into points at another institution on a one-to-one basis:

- You wouldn't be able to put your OCA credit points towards a completely unrelated course.
- The receiving institution (the one you're going to) might consider your OCA credits are only partially relevant to the course you want to do. They may offer only partial acceptance (eg allowing you to count 60 of your credit points towards the new qualification rather than your full 120).
- Credits to be transferred have to be 'mapped' to the relevant OCA courses.

If you're studying at Level 3, credit points can't be transferred because the degree classification (First, Upper Second, etc.) is awarded at this level. The institution with whom you are studying at Level 3 will award the degree.

Accreditation of prior learning (APL)

What happens if you've got some credit points from another institution and want to bring those with you to OCA? This is called Accreditation of Prior Certified Learning (APCL) and allows you to claim credit for what you've already achieved so that you can reduce the length of time it takes to get a qualification. For example, if you already have 120 credit points at Level 1 and 60 points at Level 2 from a relevant course at another institution, you would potentially only need 60 points at Level 2 (one OCA course at Level 2) and 120 points at Level 3 (two OCA courses at Level 3) to complete your degree, subject to approval by OCA. There are conditions attached to credit transfer.

Or perhaps you've done quite a lot of studying in the arts before you enrolled with OCA but didn't get it formally assessed and weren't awarded any points towards a qualification. The good news is that you may be able to count this towards a formal qualification provided that you can show that your learning was at the required level and is relevant to your study path. This is called Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

If you're not sure whether your previous experience is likely to be eligible for credit points, there are some examples of successful APEL portfolio submissions in a range of arts subjects on the OCA website.

For more information on all aspects of APL, read the [APL guidance notes](#) on the website.

Listening to our students

We aim to provide the best possible courses and the best possible services to all our students, whether studying for leisure or for a qualification. To be able to do this, we need to enter into a dialogue with our student population and this section outlines some of the ways in which this might happen.

The online forum

Although we run a wide range of events from our HQ and hold workshops around the country, students are inevitably limited by time constraints and geographical distance. You may only be able to attend a few of these events during your time with OCA. That's why our online forums are so important. Anyone with an internet connection can log in and immediately exchange views and opinions with fellow students. Peer discussions with other students can be immensely helpful to you by offering different perspectives on the course and perhaps helping to sort out any difficulties you've been experiencing. It helps us, too. OCA staff regularly review the online forums, read and discuss your comments and, where possible, try to act on them. We want to hear from as many students as possible – not just the same few voices. So however busy you are, please consider helping yourself and OCA by contributing to the forums from time to time.

Student suggestions

At OCA we are constantly reviewing, redeveloping and introducing new courses. We will from time to time contact you for your suggestions on this. We may contact you in the form of a student course questionnaire or you may be contacted by one of our Academic Services team.

If you do have any suggestions to offer whilst doing your course, please let us know by completing the **Suggestions/complaints form** on the website. You can email it or contact us by post.

We welcome constructive criticism as well as positive comments. If you have a complaint, our complaints procedure is outlined on page 36.

The 'small print'

At OCA we aim for an informal and friendly approach, but in some areas we are bound by procedural or legal considerations – the small print. This section covers:

- your tutor's responsibilities
- OCA assessment regulations
- code of practice on using the internet
- data protection statement
- withdrawing from your course
- deferring study
- transferring courses
- making a complaint.

Your tutor's responsibilities

Time limits to tutorial support – dormant students

If you receive distance tuition and have not deferred, then our responsibility is limited to providing tutorial support for 2 years from the date of enrolment, provided that you've kept in touch with your tutor. If you have deferred for a period, our responsibility is limited to providing tutorial support for 2 years plus the period for which you were on deferral.

If you receive distance tuition and your tutor has not heard from you for more than three months, with no indication that you have either deferred or are experiencing a delay sending assignments, then your tutor will consider that you are a dormant student and return your files to OCA. If neither we, nor your tutor, have heard from you for more than six months, we do not regard ourselves as under any obligation to provide further tutorial support. If you have to delay sending work, the best thing to do is to keep your tutor regularly informed so that your file is not returned as dormant.

OCA assessment regulations

- OCA's accrediting university, Bucks New University, controls the conduct of formal assessments, moderation and the awarding of grades.
- OCA publishes guidance to students on procedures for the assessment of work.
- OCA sets dates by which registration for assessment must be received, dates by which materials must be submitted and dates by which the grade recommendations must be received.
- OCA oversees the process of the selection of assessors.
- OCA's accrediting university shall, as appropriate, appoint external examiners.
- Grades recommended by assessors shall not be published until ratified by OCA's accrediting university.
- Appeals against grading shall only be considered where agreed administration procedures in the conduct of an assessment have not been followed. In the event of an appeal against the administration of the assessment process, OCA shall, as it sees fit, deal with the matter. Appeals lodged more than three months after the receipt of a grade certificate will not be considered.
- Students may not resubmit work in a revised form for reassessment on the same course unless they have received the grade F (retrievable). In such a case the resubmission must be made within twelve months of the date of the original submission. Work resubmitted following an F (retrievable) will only be eligible to obtain a 'capped' pass mark of 40% (Grade D).
- Students are required to sign an affirmation of authenticity before work can be assessed. Where it is evident that students have submitted work which is not their own, or where there is clear evidence of plagiarism, the work will not be eligible for assessment.
- Students who are unable to submit work for assessment at the appropriate time, because of medical or other special circumstance, should notify Academic Services immediately if they wish to be considered for assessment at a later date. Students should note that later assessment is not an automatic right.

Code of practice using OCA online forums

Etiquette is an important aspect of participating in an online forum, as a post directed towards one person can be read by a great number of other individuals each of who may interpret what you have written in a way not intended. To reduce the potential for upsetting people, please stick to OCA's forum etiquette guidelines below:

- No swearing. A post containing swearing will either be edited by OCA or removed entirely. The individual responsible will be given a warning by E-mail.
- Posts intended to cause offence against an individual or a group of people will be removed and a warning will be sent to the individual by E-mail.
- Individual issues with OCA procedures should be raised directly with the OCA, not posted.
- Repeated posts about an issue already dealt with will be removed, and an explanation will be sent to the individual by E-mail.

When making posts to the forums, also consider the following:

- When linking to an image or video on the OCA website that is not your own, or to an image or video elsewhere on the Internet, give the owner full credit and if possible provide a link to the website where the image or video was taken from.
- Be considerate when using symbols and smilies – they can change the tone of an entire post, and the excessive use of smilies can be an irritation.
- Exclamation marks indicate varying degrees of loudness or enthusiasm, excessive use can be off-putting to readers and cause annoyance.
- Use of capital letters is generally interpreted as shouting and should be avoided.
- The '@' symbol should be avoided when posting a person's e-mail address, as these symbols are searched for by companies that harvest e-mail addresses for marketing campaigns – use [at]
- Consider an individual's privacy before disclosing any information about them on a forum. Posts that are reported to contain sensitive information will be removed. Continued breach of privacy will result in a warning.

If an individual has to be warned about incidents on several occasions, they will lose their student privileges on the OCA website.

Data protection statement

When you enrolled you provided us with certain personal details. OCA uses this information only for its normal purposes, such as providing you with tutorial support and information. Your name, address, phone number and email address will not be revealed to other students, unless you specifically gave permission for this on the enrolment form.

OCA does not pass on information provided by enquirers and students without their permission to other organisations.

Withdrawing from your course

If the course does not meet your requirements, simply return the package of course materials in full, securely packed, by recorded delivery **within 14 days** of receiving the materials. We will then refund your payment in full minus a packing and dispatch charge or credit your account, providing the materials reach OCA in mint condition. Beyond 14 days, the materials are non-returnable. However, you may withdraw within **30 days** of receipt of materials, but you will forfeit the sum of money that is named as the deposit for the instalments scheme in the Guide to Courses plus the packing and dispatch charge. Thereafter, we do not allow refunds, and you may not cancel instalment payments before payment in full.

Complete the **Withdrawal form**.

If we are unable to provide tutorial support, your money will be refunded in full on return of the course materials. If you keep the course materials, you will be refunded all except a charge for the materials.

Deferring study

Beyond 30 days and up to 12 months from the receipt of your course materials, you may defer your course for a period of up to one year from the date of deferral. To do this, complete the **Deferral form**. Only one deferral is allowed. This option is only available to students who pay in full or who, if paying by instalments, continue to pay the instalments.

If you wish to restart your course at an earlier stage (eg if you half completed the course but wish to start again from the beginning) a charge will be made for each tutorial or distance assignment that you retake. When you resume your course, you will have the remainder of the original 2 years in which to complete (eg if you deferred after 6 months you will have 18 months from the date you resume in which to complete).

Refunds will not be made to students who have deferred but who do not then restart the course.

In unusual circumstances a student may have to delay submitting an assignment for a substantial period. If this delay is expected to be less than three months, simply notify your tutor when you expect to submit the assignment. (But be aware that tutorial support ends 2 years from the date of enrolment.) If the delay will be longer than three months, or if a delay of less than three months will take you beyond the 2 year limit, you should consider deferral and complete the **Deferral form**.

Transferring courses

It is unusual but it may be possible to transfer onto another course. There are costs involved in providing new materials, paying for tuition already received and covering administrative expenses. Please contact Academic Services free on 0800 731 2116 for more information.

Complaints procedure

If you have a problem with the course, with Academic Services, with your tutor or any other aspect of OCA service, we want you to tell us about it.

OCA has a straightforward complaints procedure to ensure that all information is logged accurately and that complaints are responded to quickly. You will receive an acknowledgement within one working day and a formal response within 21 days from the time your complaint first reaches us.

Your first step should be to complete the **Suggestions/complaints form** and email or post it to OCA. Please give as much detail as possible to allow us to deal with your problem quickly. We will try to resolve the complaint to your satisfaction so that you can go on to enjoy the rest of your course. Please let us know promptly if there is a problem – if we don't know about it, we can't help.

Frequently asked questions

How long should my course take to complete?

This varies between individuals, but the average for most courses is 12–15 months, depending on how slowly or quickly you work and on the number of hours you spend studying each week. For example, if you spend an average of 10 hours a week on a Level 1 course (400 hours), it will take you around ten months to complete. A Level 2 or 3 course (600 hours) will take around a year and a half to complete if you work for an average of eight hours each week.

How do I make contact with my tutor?

You should receive your tutor's contact details with your course materials. Let us know immediately if they are missing.

I've opted for distance tuition. How will I communicate with my tutor?

That's for you and your tutor to decide between you. If you choose to send assignments to your tutor by post, your tutor will return your marked work along with feedback by post. A lot of students find it easier to communicate by email and some students choose to receive tutor feedback by phone.

How does face-to-face tuition work?

You and your tutor arrange mutually convenient times throughout the course to meet (usually coinciding with work produced for each assignment) and you get verbal feedback during the meeting. A written progress report will be sent to OCA and to you towards the end of the course.

How much tutor time comes with my course?

All your tuition is one-to-one, unless you and your tutor decide otherwise. If you receive distance tuition, your course fee includes the time taken by your tutor to consider and comment in detail on the assignments. If you receive face-to-face tuition, the fee covers five hours of direct time in the form of meetings with your tutor.

Can I buy more tuition?

Yes, you can buy extra distance or face-to-face tuition. Simply contact OCA.

What if I need to ask a question between assignments?

The OCA website has discussion forums which are regularly monitored. This is the first place for getting answers to general questions. Your tutor will advise when and how he or she can be contacted between assignments. Bear in mind that your tutor is a busy person and has only contracted to spend a certain amount of time as an OCA tutor. Please be considerate about when and how often you contact your tutor between tutorials.

Is it possible for me to have contact with my tutor by webcam?

In some cases, yes – ask your tutor. There is also a **Webcam information sheet** on the website.

Can you offer help to students with disabilities, health difficulties or caring commitments?

Studying at home at a pace that suits you should be helpful. Your tutor and OCA staff will help you get the best out of your course. Timetables and assignment deadlines can be extended as necessary. Please contact Academic Services for further information.

I have just received a bursary and I intend to work towards a degree. Will I be eligible for the same bursary award for future courses?

We cannot guarantee any future bursary awards as all applications are judged on their own merits at the time of receipt.

How do I register to use the website as an OCA student?

Go to www.oca-uk.com/register and fill in your details. OCA's webmaster will update your permissions within 48 hours of registration.

I have sent my profile to my tutor but haven't heard anything. What should I do?

Try to contact your tutor by phone or email to check whether he or she has received it. If you don't get a response within a week, contact Academic Services so that we can investigate.

Do I have to wait for my tutor's assignment feedback before continuing with the course?

It's up to you. You may find it helpful to have feedback before continuing, but if you feel like carrying on, then do!

I'm thinking of going on to further study after my OCA course. Can you advise?

Many students gain entry to college or university using their OCA portfolio of work. The earlier you discuss your plans with your tutor the better. Sometimes credit points you have accumulated with OCA can be transferred to another institution, but we advise you check their entry requirements at an early date. See page 24 for more information on transferring credits.

I've started my course but personal circumstances mean that I can't carry on with it for the time being. Can you help?

We understand that circumstances can change and unexpected situations arise. We'll do our best to accommodate you so that you can continue the course at a later date. If you started your course within the last 12 months, you can apply to defer studying for up to a year. If you are more than 12 months into the course, please contact us outlining the problem and we will try to agree a compromise with you. Each case is looked at on an individual basis.

What do I do if I can't complete the course within the given time guide?

The time guides are only suggested. You have 2 years from the date of enrolment to complete the course and extensions can be given in certain circumstances.

When do you have formal assessments and when do I apply to have my work assessed?

There are three assessment events every year, in March, August and November. You apply when you have completed the penultimate assignment on your course.

What do I send for assessment?

Read **Assessment and how to get qualified** for general information. Submission requirements specific to your course are included as an appendix to the course materials, but can also be viewed on our website.

Do I have to wait for my assessment grade before enrolling onto another course?

No.

I have received a certificate from OCA but not a transcript from the university. When will this be issued?

Providing you have returned the university registration form to us, your transcript will be issued by the end of the academic year (the end of July). Occasionally transcripts are sent sooner, but the university has its own timescales which can vary.

Is it safe to buy a course from the OCA during the credit crunch?

Yes. All payments made on a credit card are protected by the card issuer. In the event that we were unable to provide tuition the credit card issuer would provide a refund as they have done recently for airlines and holiday companies who have failed. However OCA has a sound financial footing so this is not something you need worry about.

Glossary

Accreditation

The process by which, after formal assessment, students are awarded credits for each completed course. These credits can be counted towards a formal qualification from OCA or another institution.

Annotations

Additions made to a document, book, online record or any other information source – for example your course materials – to clarify a point, remind you of the information's source, cross-reference to another resource, etc.

APL (APCL, APEL)

APL means Accreditation of Prior Learning or putting studying that you've done before you enrolled with OCA towards a formal qualification with us. This applies both to previous study that's been formally assessed (APCL or Accreditation of Prior Certified Learning) or study experience relevant to your OCA course that wasn't formally assessed at the time (APEL or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning).

BA (Hons) Creative Arts Degree

A degree qualification awarded through BNU to students with a total of 360 credit points (from OCA or elsewhere through APL) at the appropriate levels.

Blog

Short for weblog, this is a website or webpage maintained by an individual as an online diary. Learning logs can be blogged and can be reviewed by tutors and examiners online.

BNU

Our partner institution, Bucks New University.

Bookmarks

An online label for your favourite or most frequently used websites to allow quicker access.

Bursary fund

A fund run by OCA's Board of Trustees to help students in financial need with the cost of course fees.

Certificate of Completion

An award presented to every student whose tutor has reported satisfactory completion of all course assignments.

Certificate in Higher Education (CertHE)

A Higher Education qualification awarded through BNU to students with 120 credits at Level 1.

Commonplace book

A notebook in which to record literary passages, quotations, poems, conversations, or any other material, including visual material, that is noteworthy.

Copyright

A form of intellectual property which gives the creator of an original work the exclusive right to publish, adapt or distribute it for a set period. During this time, anyone else who copies, adapts or publishes the work without the copyright holder's permission is infringing copyright and acting illegally.

Credits

Points awarded for courses as a result of formal assessment. These can count towards a formal qualification.

Credit transfer

The process whereby students can transfer credit points gained between institutions, subject to the regulations of the receiving institution.

Data protection

Under the provisions of the Data Protection Act, institutions like OCA can only use the personal information provided by students for internal administration. This information cannot be passed to other students, or to other organisations, without the individual's informed consent.

Deferral

OCA's deferral procedure allows students to suspend study for up to one year, subject to certain conditions.

Delicious

A free social bookmarking service that allows you to view popular bookmarks, share bookmarks with friends and access your own bookmarks (favourite websites) from any computer at any time. Visit <http://delicious.com>

Diploma in Higher Education (DipHE)

A Higher Education qualification awarded through BNU to students with a total of 240 credits at Levels 1 and 2.

Discussion threads

A series of messages on an online forum or discussion site that share a common subject heading.

Equality and diversity

This means that all OCA students will be treated with equal consideration by staff and tutors irrespective of race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, appearance, age or marital status.

Flickr

An online photo management and photo sharing application. Visit www.flickr.com

Formal assessment

Examination of work by an independent assessor leading to the award of a grade and credit points towards a formal qualification.

Learning blog

A student learning log linked to, or kept on, the OCA website.

Learning log

An informal but essential record of your learning and your reflections as you progress through the course.

Notebook

A generic term to describe the various types of note taking required by OCA students.

OCA Award

A graded award given to students who choose to have their work formally assessed.

Online forum

A vehicle for peer discussion and contact between students on the OCA website.

Qualification pathway

A coherent set of courses following certain prerequisites and leading to a formal qualification.

Reflective journal

Another name for the learning log, used within certain OCA courses.

Sketchbook

A book in which to record visual notes, providing evidence of your progress through the course (compulsory for visual art courses).

Student profile

The personal information that students send to their tutor at the start of each course.

Weblinks

Enable you to access further websites directly from the website you're visiting; allow you to direct readers of your learning blog to relevant websites.

YouTube

A means of sharing videos on the internet www.youtube.com



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