



Open  
College  
of the Arts



**UNIVERSITY FOR THE CREATIVE ARTS**

**PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR:**

**BA (HONS) VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS**

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION [ACADEMIC YEAR 2017/18]

*This Programme Specification is designed for prospective students, current students, academic staff and potential employers. It provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the intended learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if he/she takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the teaching, learning and assessment methods, learning outcomes and content of each unit can be found in the Unit Descriptors.*

## Section A – Material Course Information

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| Validating Body  | University for the Creative Arts <sup>1</sup> |  |
| Teaching Body  | OCA – OPEN COLLEGE OF THE ARTS                |  |
| Final Award Title and Type   | BA (Hons)                                     |  |
| Course Title   | Visual Communications                         |  |
| Course Location and Length   | Campus:<br>OCA/Open and<br>Flexible Learning  | Length:<br>Maximum time<br>allowed to complete<br>the programme is 12<br>years |
| Period of Validation   | 2015/16 to 2019/20                            |  |
| Name of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body   | Not Applicable                                |  |
| Type of Accreditation  | Not Applicable                                |  |
| Entry criteria and requirements <sup>2</sup>   |   |  |
| <p>Level 4 are open access, so no prior qualifications are required. In order to progress to Level 5, students must have gained 120 credits at Level 4, through study or by Accreditation of Prior Learning.</p> <p><i>Internet access and IT skills*</i></p> <p>The primary mode of communication on OCA courses is online, therefore, it is important that all students must have readily available internet access and the basic IT skills listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- the ability to access, read and write emails, reply to emails and forward emails.</li> <li>– upload and download attachments</li> <li>-- search for information on the internet and complete and submit web-based forms</li> <li>-- save web pages and download files from the web</li> <li>-- click on links on a webpage and navigate to another page</li> <li>-- copy web content, including images, into a document and know how to print it out</li> <li>-- use standard word processing software</li> </ul> <p>Students must also be aware of network etiquette and security considerations when using email and the internet. There is a section in OCA’s Student Regulations about online etiquette (point 17). In addition there is a Data Protection and Confidentiality</p> |   |  |

<sup>1</sup> Regulated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England

<sup>2</sup> This should be the standard University Criteria unless otherwise approved by the Academic Board and include UCAS entry profile for undergraduate courses.

Policy appended to the Student Regulations. OCA takes these issues seriously. Data protection rules forms part of OCA's Conditions of Enrolment. In addition to the information located in our student documentation OCA is developing short videos to explain netiquette and online security.

Students will be required, as part of this programme of study, to develop further IT skills in specific applications, such as Photoshop and Illustrator.

\*This requirement may waived, on rare occasions, by the Head of Learner Support if negotiated prior to the start of the course. Typically, exemptions are only given to students with specific disabilities or to those studying in prison.

#### *UCAS entry profile*

n/a

#### *English language requirements*

All students need to have an appropriate standard of English to complete their chosen course of study, which will include a substantial written element. International or EU students will need to provide evidence of their ability, which could be i) prior education in the medium of English, ii) long term residency in an English speaking country or iii) one of the following international qualifications:

IELTS (International English Language Testing Service): A minimum score of 6\*

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language): Minimum score of 550 (Paper PBT), 213 (Computer CBT), 80 (Internet IBT)

Other equivalent exams will be considered.

#### *Specific requirements*

In addition to meeting the admission requirements for all courses, students should ensure they understand the nature of the challenges and requirements of the course they are enrolling on, as outlined on the OCA website.

#### *Disabled students*

Applications from students with disabilities are considered using the same criteria and principles as all other applicants. All students with a disability are encouraged to indicate this on their application form in order that advice can be offered on the facilities and services available. Prospective students with a disability are encouraged to discuss their requirements with the Head of Learner Support.

#### *Maximum period of registration*

The maximum period of registration for the course is 12 years. Students may take up to two years to complete a single unit, however, they must complete the entire course within the 12 years period.

|   |   |                  |             |
|---|---|------------------|-------------|
| Overall methods of assessment <sup>3</sup>                        | Written exams:  | Practical exams: | Coursework: |
| Stage 1   | 0.0%  | 0.0%             | 100.0%      |
| Stage 2   | 0.0%  | 0.0%             | 100.0%      |
| Stage 3   | 0.0%  | 0.0%             | 100.0%      |
| Overall Learning & Teaching hours <sup>4</sup>                    | Scheduled:  | Independent:     | Placement:  |
| Stage 1   | 12.5%   | 87.5%            | 0.0%        |
| Stage 2   | 8.3%  | 91.7%            | 0.0%        |
| Stage 3   | 5.0%  | 95.0%            | 0.0%        |
| General level of staff delivering the course <sup>5</sup>         | The OCA's current policy is to recruit tutors who have at least an MA level professional practice in a relevant discipline or field and HE level teaching experience. All tutors are encouraged to work towards professional Recognition by the Higher Education Academy. This is a requirement for Programme Leaders and Unit Leaders. All tutors are expected to be professionally active, and engaged with contemporary developments in their field. |                  |             |
| Mode of Study   | Full-time   |                  | Part-time ✓ |
| Language of Study   | English   |                  |             |
| Subject/Qualification Benchmark Statement:<br>Art & Design (2008) |   |                  |             |
| Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)              |   |                  |             |

### The course structure

The structure of all OCA undergraduate awards awarded by the University complies with OCA's Academic Regulatory Framework which has been validated by the University. All students are registered for a particular award. Exit awards are available to students in line with 5.6 of the OCA Academic Regulatory Framework.

| Unit codes and titles | Level | Credit value | Elective/ Core | Most popular |
|-----------------------|-------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
|-----------------------|-------|--------------|----------------|--------------|

<sup>3</sup> As generated by the unit descriptors and calculated for the overall course stage data.

<sup>4</sup> As generated by the unit descriptors and calculated for the overall course stage data. Expressed as a percentage of total learning hours per stage.

<sup>5</sup> Include general information about the experience or status of the staff involved in delivering the course, for example Professor, Course Leader, Senior Lecturer

|  |   |    |          | <b>student choice of optional elective units or elective options in core units?</b> |
|--|---|----|----------|---|
| Year 1   |   |    |          |   |
| VC4GDC - Graphic design 1: Core Concepts (OVCM4130)                | 4 | 40 | Elective | Yes   |
| VC4KSI - Illustration 1: Key steps in Illustration (OVCM4106)      | 4 | 40 | Elective | Yes   |
| VC4ABK - Book Design 1: Artists' Books (OVCM4122)                  | 4 | 40 | Elective | No  |
| VC4CBD - Book Design 1: Creative Book Design (OVCM4123)            | 4 | 40 | Elective | Yes   |
| VC4ISK - Illustration 1: Illustration Sketchbooks (OVCM4139)       | 4 | 40 | Elective | No  |
| VC4VSD - Visual Skills 1: Visual Dynamics (OVCM4126)               | 4 | 40 | Elective | No  |
| DR4DRS - Drawing 1: Drawing skills (OVCM4105)                      | 4 | 40 | Elective | No  |
| PH4EYV - Photography 1: Expressing your vision (OVCM4111)          | 4 | 40 | Elective | No  |
| PM4PMI - Printmaking 1: Introduction to Printmaking (OVCM4113)     | 4 | 40 | Elective | No  |
| AH4WSA - History of Art 1: Understanding Western art (OVCM4117)    | 4 | 40 | Elective | No  |
| AH4UVC - Visual Studies 1: Understanding Visual Culture (OVCM4118) | 4 | 40 | Elective | No  |
| CA4CAT - Visual Studies 1: Creative Arts Today (OVCM4103)          | 4 | 40 | Elective | No  |
| Year 2   |   |    |          |   |
| VC5GRD - Graphic Design 2: Working with a Client (OVCM5104)        | 5 | 60 | Elective | Yes   |
| VC5ILL - Illustration 2: Responding to a Brief (OVCM5105)          | 5 | 60 | Elective | Yes   |
| VC5VEX - Visual Skills 2: Visual exploration (OVCM5130)            | 5 | 60 | Elective | No  |
| DR5DRA - Drawing 2: Investigating drawing (OVCM5103)               | 5 | 60 | Elective | No  |
| PM5PMD - Printmaking 2: Developing your Style (OVCM5113)           | 5 | 60 | Elective | No  |
| Year 3   |   |    |          |   |

|   |   |    |      |  |
|---|---|----|------|--|
| VC6ADP - Visual Communications<br>3: Advanced Practice (OVCM6101)           | 6 | 40 | Core |  |
| VC6RES - Visual Communications<br>3: Visual Research (OVCM6127)             | 6 | 40 | Core |  |
| VC6SYP - Visual Communications<br>3: Sustaining your Practice<br>(OVCM6126) | 6 | 40 | Core |  |

## Section B - Course Overview

### Key Features

The BA (Hons) Visual communication course offers an accessible distance learning experience through which students are encouraged to develop a sense of visual enquiry, expand their horizons, and begin to find a personal creative voice within their practice.

The course provides an interdisciplinary approach to study through which students can choose and explore a breadth of subjects, moving towards specialisms in graphic design, illustration or a combination of these subjects.

An Open and Flexible Learning environment supports a broad range of student expectation and needs, helping to develop the skills necessary for autonomous learning and provides high quality and stimulating learning materials and resources.

The course team is made up of a range of appropriately qualified and experienced tutors who are all either current practitioners within the field or lecturing at other UK art colleges or Universities.

A supportive learning environment that encourages students to develop a personal creative voice within their work, to apply their skills creatively within a range of contexts including client-led and self-negotiated projects, and to develop a personal and/or professional understanding of their discipline that can be extended into employment, self-employment, further study, or continued personal development.

Integration of theory and practice that supports critical reflection in accessible ways and widens the cultural, social, political and commercial contexts that frames students understanding of the discipline and their own work.

The opportunity to join and contribute to a diverse distance learning community through forum discussions, study visits and other platforms that allows for wider interaction, networking, collaboration and reflection.

## Section C - Course Aims

- A1 To widen access to art and design education at undergraduate level through Open and Flexible Learning.
- A2 To provide an interdisciplinary course of study across graphic design and illustration through which students develop specialisms.
- A3 To provide an intellectually stimulating programme of study based on high quality study material and tutor support.
- A4 To encourage the development of a personal and/or professional understanding of visual communication practices and to establish a personal creative voice within them.
- A5 An opportunity for students to apply their skills, knowledge and understanding creatively and within a range of appropriate contexts.
- A6 To develop autonomous learners capable of applying intellectual and practical skills within employment, sole practice, further study, or life-long learning.

#### Section D - Course Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course students are able to:

##### Knowledge and understanding

- 1 Demonstrate a critical and contextual understanding of contemporary practice and own practice within it.
- 2 Demonstrate use of research and enquiry in the development of own creative practice.
- 3 Select appropriate ways to effectively communicate ideas.
- 4 Show a detailed critical and contextual understanding of own creative practice in relationship to wider graphic design contexts.

##### Application

- 1 Initiate and undertake self-directed projects that show creative application and the development of a personal visual language
- 2 Present a synthesis of your creative and technical skills, conceptual and contextual understanding through a sustained body of work.
- 3 Demonstrate an ability to apply creative problem solving in response to that evidences an increasingly personal visual voice
- 4 Generate visual research, creative ideas, visual experimentation and outcomes that respond effectively to client-led projects
- 5 Use visual design skills to present your ideas to an increasingly high visual standard.
- 6 Operate in professional contexts that are relevant to your practice, requiring the application of specific interpersonal, professional and business skills within an ethical framework.

## Section E - Learning, Teaching and Assessment

### Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies

The Open College of the Arts offers all students the same quality of core learning experience, and supports a broad range of student expectations and needs through its open and flexible learning environment. The OCA provides high quality and stimulating learning materials and resources to meet the needs of students learning at a distance, and adopts learning strategies that help students develop the skills necessary for autonomous learning.

The core offer consists of

- learning materials
- one to one feedback and support from a named tutor
- support materials (such as guides on aspects of study)
- access to dialogue with peers via the OCA student website
- learner support for any difficulties with the practicalities of studying
- library resources (such as Oxford Art online and Bridgeman Education Art Library)

In addition to the core aspects of study, students may access the following on an ad hoc basis:

- study visits (eg to exhibitions) in different parts of the country
- current creative arts reviews and discussion via the OCA blog

### PDP

Personal and professional development has been linked to all levels of the course through the learning log to help support students to plan, integrate and take responsibility for their personal, career and academic development.

The log is used as a tool for self-reflection to document and reflect on progress, and to reflect on tutor feedback. In dialogue with tutors through formative feedback, students are encouraged to identify strengths and learning needs, and establish learning goals that might improve perceived weaknesses and enhance strengths.

Individual units at level 6 all have outcomes that specifically relate to skills transferable to the workplace, through engagement with client led, competition or self-initiated projects located in external contexts. The learning at levels 4 and 5 support this engagement through a process of identifying opportunities relevant to student's needs, goals, and ambitions.

### Independent Learning

The Art and Design Benchmarks say that: 'Active learning through project-based enquiry has



always been a feature of the art and design curriculum in higher education. Through this approach students have been encouraged to develop both the capacity for independent learning and the ability to work with others.’ Through the OCA model of open learning units, providing projects and research activities, students learn to study independently, while backed up by tutor support, and learn to work with others by interacting with them, providing and receiving support and exchanging ideas on the OCA forum.

#### Communications

Communications between OCA, tutors, and students is predominantly via email. In a small minority of cases, where students do not have internet access, communications is by post and telephone. We are encouraging the use of Skype for tutorials, as this can enliven the interaction between tutor and student.

Peer communications takes place in the student forums, on a dedicated OCA Facebook site, or via comments on The We Are OCA blog or other student blogs.

#### Delivery

**Open tuition:** Students work from the course materials and send regular assignments to their tutor, normally by email. Tutors then review each assignment and provide written feedback. There are typically 5 assignments for each course, supplemented by projects. Students agree the length of time they will take over each section of the course with their tutor, and agree an approximate time when they will submit their assignment. This varies from student to student, but typically the timing of delivery of assignments is between 8 and 12 weeks. Students are also able to contact tutors informally between assignments (subject to reasonable limits). In addition to the formative feedback received from the tutor, students can submit their work for formal (summative) assessment at OCA at one of three assessment events that take place each year, and are required to complete their course within two years.

Tutor reports are copied to the OCA head office and subject to periodic review to ensure standards are being maintained. These reviews are conducted on a rolling programme, with tutor reports reviewed by course leaders and The Director of Teaching and Learning Quality. All new tutors have their reports monitored by both staff for the first six months, and mentoring is provided. Subsequently reports are looked at during each formal assessment event, in conjunction with student work and feedback is given to tutors, where necessary. If any cause for concern about a tutor’s reports is raised, the tutor is closely monitored and mentored for a period.

**Course materials:** The written course materials have been specifically produced for open learning delivery and are designed for individual self-study. They consist of subject-specific learning content and a series of learning projects each culminating in an assignment, the results of which are discussed with the tutor. The course materials contain a balance of practical exercises and large scale projects and research points.

**Study Skills Guides:** There are guides on keeping sketchbooks, writing learning logs, study skills, and keeping blogs, among others. All of these are sent to the students at the beginning of the programme and are also available as downloads from the OCA website.

**Reading Lists:** The course has a comprehensive study list composed of key texts, journals

and websites for each unit. In addition to this, items are added to the study list as new recommendations are received and items published. At higher levels, when students undertake their own projects, reading lists are negotiated with tutors.

#### Costs of additional materials/resources

As a general rule of thumb, students pay for their work to be sent to OCA, and OCA pay for it to be returned (where applicable). Current (inland) postage at the cheapest rate is £11 (up to 5kg) and if a courier is required it is about £40 for a similar weight. Costs will vary according to the size and nature of the student work, and how much can actually be done electronically. Rates for overseas students will be higher.

Approximate additional materials/resources costs for Photography are £250 for Level 1, £500 for Level 2 and £400 for Level 3.

Web forums: OCA has a dedicated website for students with the following features: online resources, discussion forums and portfolios for individual student's work.

The student forums represent the main method of communications between students and their peers. Concepts are discussed and knowledge developed through debates that are informally moderated by OCA tutors. Critiques of work, both in development and completed, are sought from peers through the forum.

The student portfolios support the forums by providing an area for work to be uploaded to, and linked to, from the forums and their blogs.

Online learning: Each unit has a number of web-based resources designed to broaden student's appreciation of the range of practice and contemporary debate on the discipline. OCA students have access to the V & A image collection and use of the Creative Commons on Flickr as well as access to the Bridgeman Education image library, and Oxford Art online, from which they may download images for comment, or to include in learning logs. Students are encouraged to keep learning blogs if they have access to the internet, so that they can share their reflections and learning online with other students, and discuss these with others on the OCA forum. OCA is currently piloting the use of Google hangouts with students, so that students can connect together, share work and discuss it. This helps avert a sense of isolation while studying.

Formative and diagnostic feedback: Guidance and formative feedback on assignments is given by the student's tutor and offers clear guidance with regard to future development. A copy of each tutor feedback report given to the student is logged with OCA in order that OCA can monitor tutor quality and performance.

Study Visits: There are a number of optional Study Visits led by OCA tutors throughout the year, for example:

- House of Illustration and the Cartoon Museum, London, 2014
- Disobedient Objectives exhibition, V&A, London, 2014
- British Folk Art, Tate Britain, London 2014

- Pick Me Up graphic arts festival and Association of Illustrators talk, Somerset House, London, 2014
- Liverpool Biennial, Tate Liverpool, Bluecoat, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 2014
- New Designers, London Business Centre, 2014
- Hannah Hoch, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2014
- Sheffield International Artist Book Competition, Bank Street Gallery, Sheffield, 2013
- Memory Palace, V&A, London, 2013
- Leeds International Contemporary Artist Book Fair, Leeds University, 2013

### Employability

The OCA is fully aware of the importance of degrees having a relevance to the world of work. However, the context for an employability audit is different for the OCA than it is for a traditional campus based HE provider, with a very broad range of ages of students, motivations to study, and varying personal circumstances. OCA's aim is to instill in its students a creative ethos and the ability to structure creative practice and the motivation to continue their practice. For many students this will mean that they continue to exhibit and publish their work for others it will mean progression to post-graduate study in the field.

### Assessment

**Assessment methods:** There are no examinations. Assessment is through the examination of personal development planning and continual reflection in learning logs or blogs, practical projects, critical reviews and essays. Assessment tasks are linked to the aims and learning outcomes of each unit. As the student progresses through the unit the assessment increasingly encourages autonomous learning and self-evaluation. Tutors provide formative feedback for each assignment during the unit, with summative feedback, and assessment once the student has completed a unit in full.

Students are assumed to be planning to enter for assessment unless it is identified at the beginning of the unit that the student does not have this aspiration. The personal tutor works with the student to advise them on the assessment process. The student uses OCA guidelines to prepare a portfolio complete with sketchbooks and learning logs (or blog) to send to OCA for assessment. This submission includes the formative assignments of each section of the unit. Assessment takes place three times per year.

### Assessment criteria

#### Creativity

Employ creativity in the process of observation, interpretation, problem analysis, proposing, visualising and/or making; articulating independent judgements and a personal creative voice

Level 4: 40%

Level 5: 35%

Level 6: 30%

#### Research and idea development

Source, analyse and assimilate research material and develop, test and evaluate ideas in order to generate ideas and solutions

Level 4: 20%

Level 5: 20%

Level 6: 20%

#### Visual and Technical Skills

Use visual skills in visualising, making and presenting, and materials, techniques and technologies to communicate ideas and information

Level 4: 20%

Level 5: 25%

Level 6: 30%

#### Context

Exercise awareness of appropriate historical, critical, professional and/or emerging contexts, debates; be informed by underlying concepts, principles and working practices; and use critical and reflective skills to support a self-directed and sustained personal and/or professional position.

Level 4: 20%

Level 5: 20%

Level 6: 20%

### Section F - Enhancing the Quality of Learning and Teaching

The course is subject to the University's rigorous quality assurance procedures which involve subject specialist and internal peer review of the course at periodic intervals, normally of 5 years. This process ensures that the course engages with the national Subject Benchmarks in Art & Design and references the National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

In addition all courses are monitored on an annual basis where consideration is given to:

- External Examiner's Reports
- Key statistics including data on retention and achievement
- Results of the Student Satisfaction Survey
- Feedback from Student Representatives

#### *Enhancing staff development*

OCA is committed to enhancing staff development. Subject specific tutor training workshops are held annually at the OCA HQ in Barnsley, which focus on team building, updating tutors on new developments, and training – including sessions on improving the quality of feedback, and practical exercises in evaluating student work. Communications with tutors is via a monthly Tutor Newsletter and a dedicated Tutor area on the student website.

### *Improving the effectiveness of student learning*

We are committed to developing courses, improving existing courses, introducing technologies for enhanced interaction (such as Google +) and improving the effectiveness of student learning. We also regularly monitor tutors' reports to students and offer guidance and mentoring (the Director of Teaching and Learning is responsible for this) if the reports need improvement.

OCA has a Head of Criticality. This role is to lead, monitor, facilitate, prime and mentor discussions in the OCA online forums.

In addition, OCA contracts with subject specialists to provide support within the forums in each subject area. The imbalance in contributions is reflected by the level of interest and engagement by student groups. Photography students, for instance, are significantly more likely to participate online than other groups.

OCA have been trialling online tutor-led structured discussions via Google hangouts and using other technologies at HE Level 6, and plan to mainstream this activity in the forthcoming academic year.

Learning log: As part of the coursework on OCA programmes, students are required to keep a learning log. This is an important tool in developing their creative practice and recording their growing understanding of the subject. For degree, diploma, and certificate students, the log is considered as part of the assessment process and contributes towards the final mark.

The exact content of the log depends on the unit. Typically they are used to record ideas, drawings, sketches, notes, influences, discoveries, thoughts, research findings and observations prompted by the projects, assignments and broader research.

Many students choose to keep logs as online blogs. Their public status allows opinions to be expressed by fellow students, or the general public if desired, on the work being produced. Being accessible to other students, they offer a wide range of interpretations of unit projects to be seen, read and commented upon by others, allowing learning to take place through social activity centered around a programme of study.