# Open College of the Arts Under 18s admissions policy

### **1. Introduction**

Students enrolling with OCA must normally be aged 18 or over by the date of enrolment onto the first unit of an undergraduate degree. Foundations units enable students between 16 and 18 years of age to enrol with OCA. This policy sets out the admissions criteria for students under 18.

This policy also sets out a small number of entry conditions for all students who are over 16 but under 18 which are necessary in order to comply with safeguarding requirements and to take into account limitations on their contractual capacity.

The OCA has a dedicated Safeguarding Policy to protect students who are under 18.

### **2. General**

As OCA’s approach may be very different from a student’s previous learning experience for example at school, OCA needs to ensure that study through distance learning is appropriate for the student who wishes to enrol.

Studying at a distance is demanding for students, involving activities such as independent practice and research. OCA students need to be able to:

* manage their time effectively
* develop effective study skills
* develop strong organisational skills
* follow self-imposed timetables
* plan effectively
* be responsible for meeting deadlines

All applicants under the age of 18 should be aware that:

* OCA offers no special support on the basis of age;
* students will need to evidence appropriate levels of creative maturity through the course;
* studying with OCA involves understanding what is being read, and being able to communicate understanding of what has been read in assignment work and through discussion with other students;
* the student, not a parent, guardian, carer or partner, will be expected to interact with tutors and OCA staff.

### **3. Suitability of course materials**

Some Foundations course units may contain material which is inappropriate for students under the age of 18 on safeguarding grounds, for example material which has been externally rated as suitable for adults only (for example, photographic images, discussion of an ‘18’ rated film, adult themes in literature).

Some Foundations course units may be considered inappropriate because the contents, though not unsuitable in their own right, may lead to a discussion of an adult nature in an online forum. Therefore the attention of students and that of parents/guardians/carers will be drawn to the risk of being confronted by adult content as a result of contributions from other students for these units.

Some Foundation course units may require a level of life experience in order to do them justice. Students under the age of 18 applying for a Foundation unit that requires such experience will be given advice and guidance about the appropriateness of their course unit choice.

Students under the age of 18 applying to OCA should also consider alternatives to studying with OCA. For example this could include studying by distance learning through the National Extension College (NEC) ([www.nec.ac.uk](http://www.nec.ac.uk/)), or taking up one of the wide range of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for example [https://www.futurelearn.com](https://www.futurelearn.com/) as a means of gauging their aptitude for open access distance learning.

### **4. Application process**

For young people between the ages of 16 and 18 years at the time of application, OCA will consider applications to study Foundations course units but will not consider applications for an undergraduate degree.

Applications must be made in writing and sent or emailed to a Course Support Adviser ([coursesupport@oca.ac.uk](mailto:coursesupport@oca.ac.uk)). The application must include:

* examples of work relevant to the chosen Foundations unit. OCA looks for evidence of an active interest in the subject and sufficient understanding to be able to benefit from the unit;
* a written statement in the applicant’s own words giving their reasons for wishing to study with OCA, explaining the reasons for their interest in the subject being applied for;
* a written record of any previous academic achievement;
* for applicants still in full-time education, a letter from their head teacher confirming their readiness to study as an independent learner.

Once this information has been reviewed, applicants may be invited to discuss their application by telephone/Google Meet/Skype with a Course Support Adviser.

Students disclosing that they have a disability will be referred to a Learner Support Adviser who will discuss with them how their disability may impact on their course, including what reasonable adjustments are available as a distance learning student. To prepare for the discussion with the Learner Support Adviser, applicants will be required to provide evidence of their disability eg a medical practitioner’s letter, and/or a copy of an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) if applicable.

The aim of the discussion with the Learner Support Adviser is to help OCA consider applications more fully. It will also provide the applicant and their parent, guardian, carer or partner with the opportunity to explore what study at the OCA will entail; the appropriateness of the chosen Foundations unit; what alternative opportunities might be available; and whether, in the light of this additional information, the applicant wishes to proceed with the application. Written notes of the meeting will be taken and, where appropriate, these will include details of any reasonable adjustments that would be made to take any disability into account.

Parents, guardians, carers or partners will often be involved in and support the application. However, the applicant will be required to confirm that it is their own wish to study with OCA.

Following the meeting, the application will be considered by the Student Services support team including:

* the Learner Support team
* the Course Support team
* the Head of Quality & Academic Support
* representatives of any other support team members deemed necessary to reach a decision.

The applicant will be notified in writing of the decision of the Student Services support team. The notification will include details of any conditions that may be applied. In cases where OCA makes the decision that the applicant will not be permitted to enrol as a student, an explanation may be provided to the applicant or their parent, guardian, carer or partner.

### **5. Continuing study**

Students aged 16-18 who have enrolled on a Foundations course and have successfully completed that unit will be permitted to register for a further Foundations course when under the age of 18 without repeating the full application process.

Students who wish to register for a further Foundations course who have not to completed the first course on which they enrolled will be required to repeat the full application process described above.

### **6. Contractual issues**

Applicants between the ages of 16 and 18 may enter into a contract for education without the consent of a parent, guardian, carer or partner. Any contract with OCA with a student between the ages of 16 and 18 is therefore with the student, not with their parent, guardian, carer or partner.

Support from parents, guardians, carers or a partner during study is valuable, but it should be recognised that the teaching relationship is between the student and OCA. The student is responsible for their academic progress and for complying with OCA regulations.

OCA’s Guidelines on Advocacy see [[www.oca.ac.uk/about-oca/policies/](http://www.oca.ac.uk/about-oca/policies/)] apply to students under 18. An advocate is any person appointed by the student to speak and/or otherwise act on their behalf. An advocate could be a parent, guardian, carer, partner, support worker or a member of an advocacy organisation. An advocate’s role is to empower students to communicate independently and make informed decisions regarding their studies. To appoint an advocate please complete an Authority for an appointed advocate to Communicate with the Open College of the Arts form. Students should contact Student Services (email [enquiries@oca.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@oca.ac.uk), phone 01226 730495) to request a form.

The enrolment form for students under the age of 18 will ask for a signature from the parent, guardian or carer to confirm that they have read and understood the safeguarding guidelines for young students and vulnerable adults.

### **7. Financial Support**

OCA Foundations courses do not qualify for part-time fee loans or grants from Student Finance England or equivalent funding bodies in Wales and Northern Ireland.

OCA has a Learner Support Scheme which can provide financial support towards the cost of a Foundations course. The award is means tested and calculated on the basis of household income. For further details please contact Student Services (email [enquiries@oca.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@oca.ac.uk), phone 01226 730495) to request an application form.

Payment for Foundations courses being studied by students under the age of 18 can only be accepted from a parent/guardian/carer on their behalf.

### **8. Appeals against an admission decision**

The decision of the Student Services support team about admission to a course of study at OCA is final. In making an application, applicants accept that OCA will not enter into debate or correspondence about the decision.

See [www.oca.ac.uk](http://www.oca.ac.uk) for a summary of requirements for individual course units at undergraduate level.