

## **Periodic Review Change Letters from Programme Leaders- February 2021**

Dear Photography students,

I am writing to update you on Periodic Review and related course developments. All university courses go through this process every five years to ensure they are relevant, up to date and offering students the best experience possible. Photography went through this in 2020, shortly after I took over as program leader. Up to that point, many of you kindly took time to respond to questionnaires and focus groups set up by Gina Lundy in addition to the usual NSS and internal survey, conversations and emails and tutors also fed in. This all provided very useful feedback on what worked well and what could be improved, and I can now update you on how course level developments are being implemented.

The curriculum is responding to several key areas that have not met your expectations in the past - the need for **learning materials to be accessible**, more **regular tutor and peer feedback and support** throughout units; greater support to **integrate theory and practice at earlier levels**; and the need to continue to **diversify and decolonize our curriculum** to stay relevant to the **shifting boundaries** of Photography.

Alongside Periodic Review, we are also seeing institutional developments from OCA's merger with University for the Creative Arts, and a new virtual learning environment called OCA Learn to support more flexible access learning materials, less static than previous delivery, more responsive and easier to update; and opportunities to meet tutors, each other, share work and study as a community.

Focus groups were help in 2019 with Robert Bloomfield, Ariadne Xenou, Jayne Taylor. You asked us to, 'increase peer group opportunities to be welcomed into our community'. Photography was early in OCA to adopt regular group work sessions in 2019-20. Student-led online meets have also evolved. As this has all been so positive, we have built on this with new sessions and tools for signposting. I hope many of you have found, or will soon find, a way to get involved in group work. Last week's blog, Ear to the ground— on [tutor-led and student-led Group Work](#) has more detail. Photography final years at OCA's recent [Virtual Open Day](#), spoke about the positive impact of such peer support. We are building group activity into future units alongside 1-2-1 tutor support, so the range of ways to share work and study aligned to units can be more flexible.

You also requested 'more chance to discuss theory and practice at earlier levels', so we're introducing new group work at levels 1 and 2 and offering new flexible text and video resources in a photography 'theory and ideas' resource called [Critical Lens](#). Some of you had raised concerns that existing students might miss out on new course materials, but OCA Learn lets us share these new materials with all of you.

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### **Timeline:**

**Now:** All students on programme can access to OCA Learn — our new virtual learning environment (VLE) Photography degree space: units, library, group work, new resources

and more. A course level student workgroup has begun this month to consult on ongoing development. I will update you with ways to get involved if you wish.

**From 01 August 2021:** Extra resources will be added - accessible to all. You will transition across to the new model units **when you reach the end of your current level.**

I hope that I have been clear in how these changes have and can continue to respond to your requirements, in a continuously evolving programme to meet the challenges of study in photography. Your ongoing feedback on developments is invaluable. I will keep you updated and on how this will be gathered and will be available to discuss questions at programme leader drop-in sessions.

Thank you to everyone who took time to give feedback and raise issues. I am excited to share these developments with you and hope you will see evidence of your voices and experience in the new materials, sessions and evolving OCA Learn site.

Thank you for your ongoing engagement and support,

Best  
Dan

Dear Textiles Students

I firstly want to thank all the students who met with me during 2019/20 in the lead up to Periodic Review. Your thoughts and ideas were enlightening and really invaluable to the way I approached developing the programme. I believe you have helped me shape a programme that stands out as a student led curriculum, suitable for an extremely wide range of learning styles, abilities and creative motivations. For you these developments will impact on your studies as you complete your current level of study and move onto the next stage.

I am delighted to share with you some of the developments you helped to bring about.

One of the first things you asked for was more support around critical thinking skills. It was also commented by students that you would like to know more about this earlier in your studies. I have therefore created Critical Thinking Study Guides to be included in the first unit of the degree but these guides will also be available to all students whenever you need them.

We discussed the burden of essay writing and that writing large quantities in an academic style does not suit everyone. In response, new units will take a more flexible approach to evidencing academic thinking through presentations, posters, blog post writing, creative practice reports, etc. as a way of celebrating a wider range of talents, abilities and experiences.

When we met you told me how the fully written learning materials are cumbersome and can be monotonous. My team and I have responded by introducing a greater range of learning activities. This has included working in groups synchronously via Zoom, for example, the How to Approach your Learning Log workshop in July last year. And asynchronously via Padlet pages and the forum like the Introducing Contextual studies Group and A Textiles Approach to Sketchbooks.

Group work will continue to sit alongside the main curriculum, however within the curriculum we will be introducing new methods of communicating course content. For example through podcast and video presentations, library viewing and reading tasks and peer networking like the ATV Meet and Greet Padlet page. The hope is that this will make your learning environment more stimulating and accessible.

One of your big asks was to get to meet each other more, to have a sense that you are part of a college community. Because of this I have developed Level Studio Meetings; student-led with Programme Leader support meetings where students from one level can get together to discuss issues, share problems and present creative practice.

And finally through curriculum design the programme will more strongly focus on aspects of sustainability within textiles. Many of you already take a conscientious approach but from now on I would like to put this area more to the centre of your studies. There will also be a greater attention to traditional textile practices and the practice of using textile methods to bring people together. Reflecting important contemporary cultural movements within Textiles and your desire as students to make meaningful and engaging work.

It has been an absolute pleasure figuring this out with you and I look forward to continuing to roll out the changes.

Best wishes

Rebecca

Dear Creative Arts Students,

As you may know, the Creative Arts programme is continuously developing the teaching and learning opportunities it offers you. You are a diverse and vibrant group of students and each of you has a unique path through the programme that I'm privileged to lead. My role is to listen to the feedback that comes from both consultations with you and analysis from National and OCA student surveys and take key points forward as part of ongoing changes to the programme. In 2020 Creative Arts underwent a periodic review, which happens every five years, at the University for the Creative Arts, our partner organisation. The review is a time to holistically reflect on the programme and understand what we have achieved and where we would like to take the course.

Creative Arts was successful in its periodic review, and I hope to give you a broad overview of how we're moving forward. One of the main reasons to study on the Creative Arts programme is the ability to explore a broad range of disciplines. However, you have let me know that there isn't enough **flexibility of choice** once you have made your decision. Students can often feel locked into their selections and unable to tailor the creative journey to meet their expectations. Moving forwards, we will be increasing the opportunity for you to have a flexibility of choice so that all your **learning has meaning** for you.

The **curriculum** continues to accommodate changes and meet your needs for **interdisciplinary** study, **diversity** and a range of **global perspectives** that you bring to the course. For example, the critical themes of **Time and Place** will continue to be explored throughout the curriculum to connect your perspective with your growing creative voice.

Analysis of student journeys through the programme has shown that students can often struggle with the change in the tempo of study when moving from level 1 - 40 credit units to the larger level 2 - 60 credit units and then back again at level 3. The curriculum will move towards a more **regular tempo of study**, where all levels will have three 40 credit units. This will give more support for your studies, and as mentioned above, greater flexibility of choice.

The curriculum will respond to two crucial areas that have not met your expectations in previous consultations and surveys - the need for learning materials that are **accessible** and more **regular tutor support** throughout your learning journey. We will continue to utilise the Creative Arts space on **OCA Learn** to develop learning that offers more

regular tutor **contact points**, and online spaces for you to engage with each other as part of a peer-supported programme. You will transition across to the new format as you achieve the milestone of reaching the end of your current level.

Finally, I would like to speak to you all as one diverse student body. You have let me know that you would like to feel more connected. One of my main aims since 2019 is to build a Creative Arts **student community**. One way of doing this is to develop **group work** sessions that enhance your studies and create opportunities for you to meet each other. Group work will continue to grow as it becomes a more integral part of your studies.

I understand that there is a lot to take in here. I hope that I have been clear in how these changes respond to your requirements, developing a continuously evolving programme, to meet the challenges of Creative Arts study. I will keep you updated and will be available to discuss any questions you have at regular programme leader drop-in sessions that you can find in the Creative Arts space on OCA Learn; I look forward to hearing from you.

Programme leader for Creative Arts  
Doug Burton

Dear Painting Department,

You may remember (those who were with us then) that I wrote to you to you last year to explain we were going through Periodic Review for the painting pathway. Many of you kindly took the time to write thoughtful and helpful advice for me and fed back on my initial ideas for this quinquennial health check for the pathway - a chance to build the painting department to suit ourselves. Alongside Periodic Review we are also seeing institutional developments from the merger with UCA, we are 'moving in' to our new virtual learning environment OCAlearn and we are undertaking a major review of how you are supported by tutors and each other. I think now is a good time to update you on how I used all your advice and input (also including unit surveys and NSS data as well as our chats, emails and posts)

I hope all of you have found, or will find this year, a way to get involved in some form of group work. Tutors and students are working to develop a variety of endeavours. As you progress to your next level, you may find that there is group work embedded in your course unit on OCAlearn, but all of you will find many more opportunities to meet each other, share work and study together.

You also asked for more structured help with research and critical writing. I have already effected some change there and will continue to use OCAlearn to ensure all students have access to excellent and appropriate resources in this area. Through OCAlearn it is easier to signpost out of one course unit and into another area such as the library.

Stage one will have more practical resources - as requested by you and accessible for all students.

There will be quite a bit of course writing happening at stage two as we change to 3 x 40 credit courses. I will retain all the feedback you gave me around wanting more time to paint and develop your ideas.

The new stage three model has been devised by the Director of Teaching and Learning for all pathways but I will begin to commission it this year. It will be 3 courses in a row rather than doing two at once and the research and practice will be more woven together. There will be more space given to thinking about curation and site. There will also be more support for research across the board - both in the new courses but also in group work and on OCAlearn so no-one will miss out at this important level.

Once these courses are developed, you will transition across to the new format as you achieve the milestone of reaching the end of your current level, but many of the changes are not limited to the new courses and I will be working to ensure that we share new discoveries and opportunities across the pathway in the spirit of generosity which is the hallmark of the painting department.

Thank you to everyone who tooks the time to fill out a survey or raise something with me. I hope you will see evidence of your voices and experience in the new pathway and the developing OCAlearn site.

Best, Emma

Dear Creative Writers,

Every five years, all university courses go through a process called Periodic Review. It's to ensure they are relevant, up to date and offering students the best experience possible. Our Creative Writing degree course went through this process earlier this year, and many of you kindly took the time to respond to our questionnaires and offer your very useful thoughts on what works well and what could be improved.

Alongside Periodic Review, we are also seeing institutional developments from OCA's merger with University for the Creative Arts. We are developing our new virtual learning environment OCALearn and we are undertaking a major review of how you are supported by tutors and each other. I think now is a good time to update you on how we will incorporate all your advice from things like unit surveys and NSS data as well as our chats, emails and posts into the proposed changes.

I hope many of you have found, or will find this year, a way to get involved in some form of group work. This was one of your clearest suggestions for improvements. Creative writing tutors offered a variety of group activities during 2020 and these were so positively received we are determined to do much more of them. You may find that there is group work embedded in your next course unit on OCALearn, but all of you will find many more opportunities to meet each other, share work and study together. We may be at a distance, but if 2020 has taught us anything, it's that there are all sorts of creative ways around this! Being a writer doesn't need to be an isolating experience and there is much research to show that peer support and feedback is invaluable.

Stage One will still begin with the core Writing Skills unit, which teaches new students the fundamentals of the craft. After that students will follow two more core units, but within those units you will be able to 'choose your own adventure', whether that is learning poetry, screenwriting or prose.

At Stage Two, we change from the current model of 2 x 60 credit units to 3 x 40 credit courses. Again, you will follow these three core units and within them you will again have the chance to specialise in areas such as poetry, script, nonfiction, writing for children and writing short fiction. So none of our current offers will be lost and in fact we will be adding to the options, with some exciting new choices to come.

The new Stage Three model has been devised by the Director of Teaching and Learning for all pathways, but I will begin to commission it this year. It will be three courses in a row rather than the current two units and the research and practice will be more woven together. There will be more space given to thinking about pathways to publication and being part of the competitive current writing industry. Our tutor team are all current writing practitioners and we want to you to benefit from their experience.

Once these courses are developed, you will transition across to the new format as you achieve the milestone of reaching the end of your current level. Some of the changes, however, such as additional group work, are not limited to the new courses and I will be working to ensure that we share new opportunities across the degree pathway. Throughout, I continue to welcome your thoughts and feedback.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to fill out a survey or raise something with me. I hope you will see evidence of your voices and experience in the new pathway and the developing OCALearn site.

All my best wishes and thank you for your ongoing support, Barbara  
Dear Visual Communications students,

This is a follow-up email to add more detail to my last email dated 29<sup>th</sup> January that broadly outlined the changes happening to the Visual Communications degree course from August 2021.

Just to summarise that email, last year Visual Communications underwent a Periodic Review (which happens every five years) at the University for the Creative Arts, our partner organisation. This review is a time to reflect on the programme, consult you for feedback and suggestions, understand what we have achieved so far and propose how we would like to improve the course. Visual Communications was successful in its Periodic Review, and I now want to give you a broad overview of how we're moving forward.

You told us you appreciated the opportunity to study both Graphic Design and Illustration, and have the choice to call yourselves 'Visual Communicators' to show you had knowledge, understanding and skills in both disciplines. For that reason it was decided to retain the majority of the current course content, and update and synthesise it so that you could study the two core disciplines synchronously rather than alternate between Graphic Design and Illustration-focused units as you currently do.

Therefore the main change to the course is to merge the existing content into a new model where the principal current electives of Graphic Design and Illustration are incorporated into a series of new units which also contain multiple choice elements in more specialist areas of visual practice. In order to do this, a new model will be established to replace the numerous existing core and elective units. We are calling this the '3 x 3' model as there will be three units at each of the three course levels which all students study. The existing stage 2 structure of two x 60 credit units will therefore become a three x 40 credit unit structure to fall in line with the new model.

For example, at the beginning of Level 1 the current 'Core Concepts' and 'Key Steps' units will be merged to become a new unit called 'Introducing Visual Communications'. The current Drawing Skills, Printmaking & Photography units will be available as electives within the new unit. The logic behind this is that Illustration-focused students can still study Drawing to develop their grounding in traditional techniques, Printmaking students can develop an understanding of print techniques applicable to image-making, editions and publications, and Photography can offer the opportunity to create lens-based imagery as reference for drawing or as content for design projects. Subsequent unit choices will include Book Design, Graphic Fiction and Visual Exploration to offer a span of experimental and specialist course content. The new units will still contain most of the existing content, but some exercises and assignments will be replaced with newly-written ones that reflect contextual and technical developments since the units were first written. At a rough figure I would say 80% of the content will be the same, just in a new, hopefully more logical and engaging structure.

Currently all the existing core and principal elective units are being restructured into this new '3 x 3' model. You will transition across to the new format as you achieve the milestone of reaching the end of your current level, so, for example, if you have started the Level 1 'Core

Concepts' and 'Key Steps' unit you will still go on to choose two more units. Or if you have started your first Level 2 60-credit unit you will still go on to complete a second 60-credit unit. Only when you finish that level will you then start on the new structure.

This new curriculum structure will respond to two key areas that have not met your expectations in previous student consultations and surveys - the need for learning materials that are accessible, and more regular tutor support throughout your learning journey. We will continue to use the Visual Communications space on OCA Learn to develop learning that offers more regular tutor contact points, regular group work sessions, and online spaces for you to engage with each other as part of a peer-supported programme.

I realise that there is a lot to take in here. I hope that I have been clear in how these changes respond to your requirements, developing a continuously evolving programme, to meet the challenges of Visual Communications study. I will keep you updated and will be available to discuss any questions you have at upcoming programme leader drop-in sessions that you can find in the Visual Communications space on OCA Learn. I look forward to hearing from you.

James Pyman  
Programme Leader for BA Visual Communications,  
BA Graphic Design & BA Illustration