

Open College of the Arts (OCA)

Under 18s Admissions Policy

1. The purpose of the policy

1.1 This policy sets out the requirements for admission to OCA courses to anyone under the age of 18. Ordinarily students must be 18 to enrol to OCA courses, however in certain circumstances, meeting the requirements as outlined below, under 18s may be admitted to study specific courses.

2. Who does the policy apply to?

2.1 This policy applies to all enquirers, applicants, and students under the age of 18 looking to study courses at OCA.

3. Linked and other relevant policies and legislation

3.1 This policy is subject to OCA's Terms and Conditions, and forms part of the OCA Student Regulations.

3.2 This policy should be read in conjunction with OCA's Safeguarding Policy and Admissions Policy.

4. General principles

4.1 OCA offers a range of educational qualifications and preparatory courses including foundations, short courses, undergraduate, and postgraduate degrees. At all levels of study, the content and subject matter may contain topics unsuitable for certain ages, therefore OCA has a duty of care to ensure that studying through distance learning is appropriate for those who wish to enrol.

4.2 Students enrolling with OCA must normally be aged 18 or over by the date of enrolment to a course of study with OCA. This policy sets out the admissions criteria for students under 18.

4.3 There are 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.

4.4 In all circumstances enquirers, applicants, or students under the age of 16 on the date they wish to enrol, will not be permitted to study.

4.5 In all circumstances applicants under the age of 18 will not be permitted to study undergraduate or postgraduate courses.

4.6 OCA does not offer any additional support on the basis of age.

5. Conditions of Study

5.1 Distance learning involves skills and activities both unique to that medium, and those used more extensively than in face-to-face settings. Students at OCA are expected to:

- Develop and utilise effective time management skills
- Follow self-imposed deadlines
- Develop effective study skills through engagement with OCA services
- Display and evidence appropriate levels of creative maturity throughout the course
- Engage with other students, through work and communication, on a range of creative topics
- Engage with OCA and studies individually and not through a third party, inclusive of parents, carers, guardians, and/or partners.

6. Suitability of course materials

- 6.1 OCA courses 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 adult themes in literature).
- 6.2 OCA courses 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.
- 6.3 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), or taking up one of the wide range of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for example <https://www.futurelearn.com> as a means of gauging their aptitude for open access distance learning.

7. Application process

- 7.1 For young people between the ages of 16 and 18 years at the time of application, OCA will consider applications to study Foundation and short courses but will not consider applications for an undergraduate or postgraduate degree.
- 7.2 Applications must be made in writing, using OCA's downloadable enrolment form, and be accompanied by the following information:
- 7.2.1 A written statement by the prospective student of the reasons why they want to do the course, and what they hope to gain from it.
- 7.2.2 A written statement from the student's parent, or legal guardian, acknowledging that studying OCA courses is done at the students own risk, and an acknowledgement that enrolling onto a course involves engagement with all elements of the prescribed learning, including discussion forums, group work, and other directed activities as appropriate.
- 7.3 Applications for study at OCA will be considered by the Student Services team, and decisions on study are made at the discretion of the Head of Student Services.
- 7.4 Where appropriate, at the discretion of the Head of Student Services, further conditions to study may be required before enrolment to OCA courses may be permitted. This includes and is not limited to; seeking the opinion of OCA Course Leaders on the suitability of the course, further evidence of education taken to that point, a short portfolio of work.

- 7.5 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.
- 7.6 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.
- 7.7 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.
- 7.8 The decision of the Head of Student Services about admission to a course of study at OCA is final.

8. Contractual obligations

- 8.1 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 and a student between the ages of 16 and 18 is therefore with the student, not with their parent, guardian, carer, or partner.
- 8.2 Support from parents, guardians, carers, or 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.
- 8.3 OCA's Guidelines on Advocacy see [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, phone 01226 730495) to request a form.
- 8.4 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.

9. Support for the policy

- 9.1 Should you need any help with this policy whilst you are enrolling to an OCA course, you should contact our Information, Advice, and Guidance team at enquiries@oca.ac.uk, where they will be able to answer any queries you have.
- 9.2 For an informal discussion on applying for courses under the age of 18, please also contact our Information, Advice, and Guidance team at enquiries@oca.ac.uk for support.

10. Control of the policy

10.1 This policy was authored by Craig Dewis, Head of Student Services in consultation with OCA Staff and given approval through OCA Oversight Management Group in November 2020.

11. Reviewing the policy

11.1 OCA will work closely with OCASA to gather student feedback on the outline of the policy, its intentions, the administration of the policy, and a review of all these points in practice. These will then be fed into the next review point for the policy.

11.2 The next review date is June 2021. If you would like to raise any issues around this policy then you should contact enquiries@oca.ac.uk, or if you are a student, you might also wish to raise these with the appropriate OCASA representative.