

Open College of the Arts (OCA) partnership with The Open University (The OU)

FAQ for OCA students

This Frequently Asked Questions document relates to the transfer of the OCA to the OU. We hope that our students find answers to your questions below but should you still have questions unanswered, we encourage you to speak with your personal tutor or email us at change@oca.ac.uk. This is a positive step for the OCA and our students and we hope that, like us, you are excited by this opportunity. The OCA, OU and UCA are all working closely to ensure this transition runs smoothly and does not disrupt your studies.

Q. Will my studies be disrupted?

A. No. We are ensuring that study is not affected by the transfer of the organisation to The Open University. You will continue to have access to the same learning environments, support, assessment events, study support, student association, tutor support, course content and services that we currently provide. Some services, e.g. Library services, may be slightly different but the core materials and offer will be equivalent or an enhancement on those you currently enjoy.

We will move you across to The Open University at a natural juncture in your studies, when you re-enrol for a new unit. You will sign new [Terms and Conditions](#) at that point confirming The Open University as your awarding institution. For a small number of you, it won't be possible to do this, and in those cases your tutor will work with you and the OCA support team to identify the best time to switch you over without disrupting your studies. If you are mid-unit or between units in January 2024 you have the option to continue with OCA and transfer to The Open University, transfer to UCA, or exit. If you transfer mid-unit you will sign new Terms and Conditions with the appropriate provider at that point of transfer.

If you transfer to The Open University you will sign up to the [Academic Regulations of Subsidiary Institutions of The Open University](#). These will replace the [Academic Regulatory Framework](#) from August 2023.

Extensions and deferrals will be available to you if you need additional time to complete your unit during this period and we will be supportive of requests. If these requests go past January 2024 you will be required to confirm your future study choices before the extension or deferral is agreed.

Q. Will OCA fees go up to match fees of The Open University?

A. OCA fees are remaining the same. We have recently [published our fees](#) for the 2022/23 academic year, and our [Student Fees Policy](#) sets out how and when we can change our fees. Any future proposal to increase fees would be decided by OCA's Board of Trustees.

Q. OCA talks about a partnership with The Open University, the OU says they have acquired OCA; which is it?

A. Acquisition is a legal term to denote the fact that OCA has been 'bought' by The Open University for a nominal fee (as we are a charity). This is different from a merger which would see a company absorbed by another company.

In this context acquisition and partnership mean the same thing. OCA will become part of The Open University Group, remaining an independent organisation and charity with our own Board of Trustees. This is exactly the same relationship as we had with UCA. It is likely that The Open University will appoint trustees, just as UCA did.

So we will continue to operate independently, but with the support of The Open University. The OU has much to offer OCA in development of digital pedagogies and systems that will help us improve your experience as a student.

Q. Will I still have access to Library Services?

A. The OU will provide similar services to those you receive through UCA. The core digital library resources and texts for your units of study will be in the same format and available to you through a sign-on process provided by the OU. You will be supported by the Library Officer at OCA who will provide guides (LibGuides) and assistance to access and use resources. Sign-Ons will be handled slightly differently, but all library assets, including newly acquired creative arts assets will be made available to OCA students and staff, and all library users.

Online chat (at specific times), support webinars and other optional services such as scanned versions of texts etc. will be available through the OCA Library Officer who will work with The OU Library colleagues. The OU Library support team will be briefed and will become the first points of contact for any requests from OCA students. Some services may be provided in different ways, for example some of the specific guides may be published on 'OCA Learn', the virtual learning environment, rather than within the UCA Library website.

Q. Will I continue to have access to OCA Learn? (OCA's VLE)

A. You will continue to be able to access the Virtual Learning Environment(s), OCA Learn, and other online OCA resources as you currently do. These services are

provided directly via OCA and we will be investing in these to ensure continuity in this service.

Q. What if I don't want to switch to The Open University?

A. We hope that all of our students will come with us and join The Open University to benefit from the additional support and opportunities that arise. If you decide this is not for you, then you can complete units through UCA up until January 2024 and obtain the award to that point or use the credits you gain to transfer to study another UCA-run programme or at another College or University.

Q. Will there be changes to tutors and/or those that provide support to me?

A. The tuition, curriculum content, services and student support you currently receive through OCA will continue to apply when you transfer to have your degree awarded through The OU. The staff based at OCA is being expanded to include additional roles to ensure that the transfer happens as seamlessly as possible. Where services do need to be swapped (see Library services above) we will ensure you receive an equivalent or better experience.

Q. Will there be changes to assessment?

A. How OCA assesses work, including learning outcomes and assessment criteria will remain unchanged. We will be adjusting some of the procedural details to align with The Open University. For example, progression to the next unit of study with OCA will be dependent on the successful completion of assessment and confirmed outcomes from the Exam Board. We are aware of the impacts this may have on student timeframes and are working on a number of solutions to this, so please bear with us as we explore this.

Students will not have to apply for assessment in the future; we've removed this as we've had students failing to meet the deadline and not being able to submit or crashing out entirely from their degree. Instead, going forward, once you've completed your unit (submitted your final assignment/project and received feedback) OCA will put you forward for the next available assessment point. You will have the option to defer assessment to the next assessment point if you need to. OCA will contact you when you are eligible for assessment to tell us what you want to do.

There will be a change in how degree classifications (First, 2:1, 2:2 etc) are determined. Degree classifications after August 2023 will be determined on the basis of marks awarded at Stages 2 (HE5) and 3 (HE6) of OCA degrees. These will be weighted at a ratio of 1:2; in other words 33% of the final mark comes from Stage 2, and 66% of the final mark from Stage 3.

For existing OCA students already at either Stage 2 or Stage 3, students' marks will be calculated using both this new system, and the current system and awarded



whichever is higher. This means that you will not be disadvantaged by the changes to degree classifications during your studies.

Q. Will my degree award change?

A. Your degree will have the same title and status, and the same credits and recognition as it does with UCA. Awards are regulated by the Office for Students who we are working with to ensure there is a smooth transfer and students receive the best outcome. The OU recognises Level/Stage 2 units (HE5) assessed outcomes towards the degree award whereas currently UCA and OCA only recognise Level/Stage 3 unit outcomes. In this case, any of our students transferring will have both algorithms applied and you will receive the higher of the two outcomes, so you will not be disadvantaged in your outcomes or classification as a result of the changes to how degrees are accredited. Any new students to the OCA from August 2023 onwards will be subject to The Open University algorithm only.

Q. What are the benefits of this change to me?

A. There are a huge number of benefits to joining the OU, in particular degree ceremonies that take place in different locations, access to OU learning services and content, and benefits from the services provided through the OU Library. More benefits will be shared as we go through the transfer process. You have an important part to play, working with the OCA student association reps, to define what 'good' looks like and how we can provide that for you.

Q. I have more questions, who do I ask?

A. Firstly message us at change@oca.ac.uk, where we are happy to answer any and all queries you might have. We will be posting updates throughout the next twelve months to "[A new chapter for OCA](#)" so check in there for more information. Your tutor should be able to assist you and answer your questions. We've allocated time for them to speak with you. We are organising virtual session(s) which you can take part in to find out more about our move to The OU.

Q. When will this change happen?

A. In July 2022 The Open University will make a legal and binding commitment to collaborate with OCA from August 2023. Throughout August 2022, we will be working closely with you to ensure you understand these changes and are able to make an informed choice about your future study. We will make further announcements throughout the next year. Throughout 2022 and early 2023 we will be working closely with you, UCA and the OU to ensure a smooth transfer. The OU and OCA will join together formally from July 2023 and the first students will transfer from August 2023. If you expect to be assessed during the Summer 2023 event (July) then we recommend you to transfer as early as possible thereafter. If not, you may be assessed at the Autumn 2023 assessment event and transfer in January 2024 or we will work with you to find a suitable mid-unit transfer point on or before the end of



January 2024. We have plenty of time to work with you and your tutor to ensure that this change takes place smoothly. When you re-enrol you will sign new [Terms and Conditions](#).

Q. I'm nearing the end of my studies. Can I complete my studies with UCA?

A. Yes. If you have already started, or are beginning your final unit of study with OCA you will be able to complete your studies and be assessed at an assessment event prior to January 2024 and consequently receive a UCA award. In the unlikely event that you fail at this assessment event you will need to retake this unit and assessment for an OU award, however OCA will support you to do this and there will be no additional cost to you to undertake the retake. Alternatively you will have the option to transfer to UCA to complete or exit with any credits awarded up to that point.

Q. Why is this change happening?

A. OCA and UCA joined together in 2016 and started a five year plan. At the end of this, both OCA and UCA have reviewed and concluded that the best interests of both institutions are in different directions. Following a lengthy discovery process, OCA approached The Open University about joining based upon the shared history of the two organisations, and consistent mission and direction of travel. OCA is confident that joining with The Open University will open new avenues and opportunities to enhance the learning experience of OCA students.

Q. I'm planning to start Postgraduate (MA) study with OCA in October 2022 - what will happen to me?

A. You will sign up to be transferred to OU study at a suitable point and as a cohort you will be moved across after you've finished your second unit assessment (i.e. after you obtain 120 credits). You will sign new [Terms and Conditions](#) that confirm The Open University as the awarding institution and obtain an Open University award with the same title. (e.g. MA in Fine Art).

Q. I'm just starting my Level 3 studies on a dual unit (2x40 credit) - what will happen to me?

A. These old pathways are being phased out gradually but are still available on certain programmes. If you are on one of these programmes then you will start one unit and then begin the second unit under the new [Terms and Conditions](#) which will apply following the announcement of the transfer from August 2022. This will allow us to move your studies across to ensure that you can continue and complete your degree without disruption. You will be transferred across at a suitable point in your studies prior to January 2024 if you choose to do so.

Q. I'm on my final unit of my degree, will I complete with UCA or OU?

- A. If you are able to complete and be assessed before January 2024 then you will be awarded your degree by UCA. If you are mid unit in January 2024, or have completed but not been assessed you will have the option to either stay with OCA and be awarded by The OU, transfer to UCA (may mean attending UCA campuses), or exit with the highest award available to you. If you need to complete retake then this would be with The OU and any subsequent award, or alternatively you could exit with credits awarded up to that point.

Q. I'm studying at Stage 1 (HE4) or Stage 2 (HE5) and want to be awarded by OU

- A. If you are currently studying at Stage 1 or Stage 2 of an undergraduate degree, you will continue on your current unit(s) as normal. After August 2023 when OCA becomes part of The OU, you will be asked if you consent to transfer to The OU for your award when you enrol in your next unit after this date. You will sign up to new [Terms and Conditions](#) confirming The OU as the awarding institution, and the [Academic Regulations of Subsidiary Institutions of The Open University](#), governing your programme. Any credits you already have will be transferred across with you. Your timeframes will remain the same and services will be equitable, they'll just look different.

Q. I'm studying at Stage 1 (HE4) or Stage 2 (HE5) and want to be awarded by UCA

- A. We hope that all students will come with us to The OU, however if for any reason you would prefer an award through UCA you can transfer to them from August 2023. Please note however that UCA does not offer online learning and attendance at UCA campuses will be required. Please contact ocatransfer@uca.ac.uk to discuss further.

Q. I'm studying at Stage 1 (HE4) or Stage 2 (HE5) but do not want to be awarded by UCA or The OU

- A. If you would prefer not to be awarded by The OU, or travel/attendance at UCA campuses is not feasible, you can be awarded any credits you have earned up to January 2024 and seek to transfer to other universities in the UK or elsewhere.

Q. I currently have an extension or deferral to my current unit; will this affect me and the options for transfer?

- A. No. If you are currently on an extension or deferral you will have the same options and be able to transfer as other students after August 2023.

Q. I'm about to request an extension or deferral, how will I be affected?

- A. You will be asked to agree to completing your studies through OCA with The OU as part of the process of approval of extension and deferrals, this will allow us to ensure that you are transferred smoothly and can pick up your studies without disruption once you are able to return. We will work with you throughout the period to ensure that when you return you have adequate time to get familiar with any change.



If you do not wish to transfer with OCA to The OU, then unless the extension and/or deferral would complete before January 2024, you will have the option to transfer to complete at UCA, or exit entirely with credit awarded to that point.

Q. Who will have access to student personal data? How will it be used?

A. OCA staff will have no access to any OU student data. OCA taught student data will be used by authorised staff only at OCA and The OU, and entered onto The OU systems to be processed for regulatory returns by The OU reporting teams. All processes will be checked against GDPR requirements and the data protection protocols of The OU.

Q. UCA is a specialist arts university, how will The OU meet the same academic quality in awarding my course?

A. The Open University is a world-leading institution in the field of distance learning. The OU has a well established Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (which OCA will feed into) and expertise in many areas of the arts curriculum. The OU has limited current options for practical applications of the arts, which is what OCA will provide. Together, OCA and The OU expand the curriculum offering for distance learning students across arts and humanities, combining the strengths of both organisations, including The OU's research and teaching and the OCA understanding and development of professional practice.