



Open  
College  
of the Arts



**UNIVERSITY FOR THE CREATIVE ARTS**

**PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR:**

**BA (HONS) VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS**

**PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION [ACADEMIC YEAR 2022/23]**

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: OCA/Open and Flexible Learning	Length: Maximum time allowed to complete the programme is 12 years	
Mode of Study	Full-time		Part-time <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Period of Validation	2021/22 – 2025/26		
Name of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body	Not Applicable		
Type of Accreditation	Not Applicable		
Accreditation due for renewal	Not Applicable		
Entry criteria and requirements <sup>2</sup>			
<p>Level 4 courses 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>In addition to prior qualifications and learning accreditation, OCA specifies three general requirements for students to be admitted to its degree programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● English language competency;</li> <li>● access to a desktop computer or laptop with internet access*;</li> <li>● the ability to easily manage a range of basic functions through ICT (information and communications technology)</li> </ul> <p>Full details on each of these requirements can be found in the OCA Student Regulations in the section Admission Requirements.</p> <p>Students will be required, as part of this programme of study, to develop further IT skills in specific applications, such as Photoshop and Illustrator.</p> <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. In addition there is a Data Protection and Confidentiality Policy appended to the Student Regulations. OCA takes these issues seriously. Data protection rules form 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.</p> <p>An unaccredited OCA Foundation Certificate is available for students who need to develop their technical and visual awareness skills before embarking on degree study.</p> <p><i>*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.</i></p> <p><i>Specific requirements</i></p> <p>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.</p> <p><i>Disabled students</i></p> <p>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</p>			

<sup>1</sup> Regulated by the Office for Students

<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.

can be offered on the facilities and services available. Prospective students with a disability will be 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.

UCAS entry profile:

n/a

Overall methods of assessment <sup>3</sup>	Written exams:	Practical exams:	Coursework:
Stage 1	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Stage 2	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Stage 3	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Overall Learning & Teaching hours <sup>4</sup>	Scheduled:	Independent:	Placement:
Stage 1	17.5%	82.5%	0.0%
	210 hours	990 hours	0 hours
Stage 2	15.0%	85.0%	0.0%
	180 hours	1020 hours	0 hours
Stage 3	12.5%	87.5%	0.0%
	150 hours	1050 hours	0 hours
General level of staff delivering the course <sup>5</sup>	OCA requires Tutors and Programme Leaders (PLs) to have knowledge of their subject area, proven communication skills, experience of delivering learning and teaching, and a first degree or postgraduate or equivalent, and/or substantial professional experience to support their roles. Tutors and PLs are encouraged to obtain professional recognition by the Higher Education Academy at an appropriate level. All Tutors engage with an induction process, an annual 'Tutor Team Meeting' and 1-2-1s, and are provided with guidance on Formative Feedback, Group Work, and Summative Assessment		
Language of Study	English		
Subject/Qualification Benchmark Statement:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>QAA Subject Benchmarks in Art &amp; Design 2017</li> </ul>			
Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)			

The course structure

The structure of all OCA undergraduate awards awarded by the University complies with the [Academic Regulatory Framework](#). The Academic Regulatory Framework includes information about the:

- Rules for progression between the stages of a course;
- Consequences of failure for reassessment and exit awards;
- Calculation and classification of awards;

Unit codes and titles	Level	Credit value	Elective/ Core	Most popular student choice of optional elective units or elective options in core units?	Order of units
<b>Stage 1</b>					

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

<sup>4</sup> As generated by the most popular unit descriptors and calculated for the overall course stage data.

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

VC4IVC– Visual Communications 1.1: Introducing Visual Communications (OVCM4171)	4	40	Core	N/A	1
VC4EVC - Visual Communications 1.2: Exploring Visual Communications (OVCM4172)	4	40	Core	N/A	2
VC4DVC - Visual Communications 1.3: Developing Visual Communications (OVCM4173)	4	40	Core	N/A	3
<b>Stage 2</b>					
VC5UVC - Visual Communications 2.1: Understanding Visual Communications (OVCM5164)	5	40	Core	N/A	4
VC5BAA - Visual Communications 2.2: Briefs and Approaches (OVCM5165)	5	40	Core	N/A	5
VC5CAA - Visual Communication 2.3: Clients and Audiences (OVCM5166)	5	40	Core	N/A	6
<b>Stage3</b>					
VC6PAR - Visual Communications 3.1: Practice and Research (OVCM6172)	6	40	Core	N/A	7
VC6EXP - Visual Communications 3.2: External Projects (OVCM6173)	6	40	Core	N/A	8
VC6MPT - Visual Communications 3.3: Major Project (OVCM6174)	6	40	Core	N/A	9

## Section B - Course Overview

### **Key Features**

The BA (Hons) Visual Communications course offers an accessible distance learning experience through which students can develop an understanding of visual enquiry and find a personal creative voice.

The curriculum explores a span of visual communication practices that encompasses graphic design through typography, editorial design, branding and packaging and illustration through drawing, image making and visual storytelling, animation and comics, all of which touch upon both traditional and digital skills and techniques.

An Open and Flexible Learning environment supports student expectations and needs, helping you to develop the skills necessary for autonomous learning. Our course team is made up of experienced tutors who are all practitioners within the field or lecturing at other UK art colleges and Universities. This learning environment encourages students to develop a personal creative voice within their work that can be extended into employment, self-employment, further study, or continued personal development.

### **Course Structure**

The course is designed to give students the widest choice of course content while retaining a strong core structure. As students move through the three course levels they can refine their study choices as the range of study options broadens, making the course truly interdisciplinary. There are three units at each stage, and summative assessment points after students complete each unit. Within each unit there is also a written or visual presentation task to support critical investigation.

#### **Stage 1:**

At stage 1 the units 1.1. Introducing Visual Communications, 1.2 Exploring Visual Communications and 1.3. Developing Visual Communications support the development of creative ideas by examining how to analyse a brief, generate and visualise ideas, use reference material to inform approaches and begin to develop content and meaning within your work. You are introduced to the visual languages of illustration and design thinking through creative problem-solving exercises, explore the relationship between form and function, and consider how to develop a creative process through researching, visualising and presenting ideas. These units also offer a gateway into specialist study through a choice of content in areas of visual practice such as drawing, printmaking and photography.

#### **Stage 2:**

Taking the relationship between a client, brief and creative practitioner as a starting point, stage 2 units 2.1 Understanding Visual Communications, 2.2 Briefs and Approaches and 2.3 Clients and Audiences support students' ability to further develop your visual language and develop the critical and reflective skills to evaluate the results. You will explore the integration of typography and visual elements within layouts and examine the role of

graphic design within identity design, branding and campaigning. You will also investigate how to use image-making in reportage, sequential narrative through storyboards, and consider a range of contemporary contexts for illustration.

Stage 2 study also offers distinct options into specialist study, from book design and visual exploration to comics and graphic novels, and enables you to summarise all that you have learned by undertaking a self-directed brief from a range of professional contexts.

### **Stage 3:**

The Stage 3 units 3.1 Practice and Research, 3.2. External Projects and 3.3. Major Project synthesize students' creative practice and research interests across a self-directed body of work, and provide a framework that enables you to foster an increasingly autonomous and professional approach. You will demonstrate your creative voice through outcomes that include a portfolio of self-directed work, a reflective learning log, and a critical thinking assignment which can be written or take an alternative presentational format.

## **Section C - Course Aims**

1. To widen access to art and design education at undergraduate level through Open and Flexible Learning.
2. To provide an interdisciplinary design course of study across through which students develop specialisms.
3. To provide an intellectually stimulating programme of study based on high quality study material and tutor support.
4. To encourage the development of a personal and/or professional understanding of visual communication practices and to establish a personal creative voice within them.
5. An opportunity for students to apply their skills, knowledge and understanding creatively and within a range of appropriate contexts.
6. 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**

- LO1 Demonstrate a critical and contextual understanding of contemporary practice and own practice within it.
- LO2 Demonstrate use of research and enquiry in the development of own creative practice.
- LO3 Select appropriate ways to effectively communicate ideas.

### **Understanding**

- LO4 Show a detailed critical and contextual understanding of own creative practice in relationship to wider Graphic Design and Illustration contexts.
- LO5 Initiate and undertake self-directed projects that show creative application and the development of a personal visual language
- LO6 Present a synthesis of your creative and technical skills, conceptual and contextual understanding through a sustained body of work.
- LO7 Demonstrate an ability to apply creative problem solving in response to that evidences an increasingly personal visual voice.

### **Application**

- LO8 Generate visual research, creative ideas, visual experimentation and outcomes that respond effectively to client-led projects.
- LO9 Use visual design skills to present your ideas to an increasingly high visual standard.
- LO10 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 and Teaching Strategy

The Open College of the Arts (OCA) strategic vision is “to be at the forefront of student-led creative arts education through open, enhanced, & supported distance learning, for an evolving society”. OCA is a non-profit educational charity, whose purpose is to widen participation in arts education through open flexible distance and online learning.

OCA uses a learning design process to consider the content, activities, and support needed to deliver course aims. This flexible approach recognises and supports a diverse range of student experiences, ambitions, and needs. In line with OCA’s core values, it also considers how to encourage more open, empowering, engaging, social, sustainable and evolving approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment.

As distance learners, students will need to work independently and to develop appropriate research and study skills. An induction programme and ‘Getting Started’ introductions are in place to support students to do this, and to help establish relationships with peers and tutors. Ongoing study skills support is available through #weareoca, OCA’s blog content, and other cross-curriculum study skills resources.

OCA’s virtual learning environment, OCA Learn, provides a platform for content, activities, and support for each unit. A dedicated Degree Space is in place to foster course wide dialogue and peer support through forum activities and shared resources. OCA has a responsibility to ensure all learning environments, content, and communication are as accessible as possible for individuals who have sensory, cognitive, neurological, physical, or other disabilities, and to provide an inclusive learning environment that acknowledges the diversity of our students’ experiences. OCA’s Student Engagement Strategy places a key focus on accessibility, with provision for designing learning materials with enhanced operability for mobile devices, which conform to all appropriate accessibility standards.

Course content is delivered through a range of learning materials, including written, video, and interactive media. These materials provide introductions and framing of subject related content, technical guidance, case studies, and other appropriate information. Materials are primarily accessed through OCA Learn, as well as #weareoca, which provides opportunities for current tutor and student-led content and debate.

Accompanying activities, such as exercises, research tasks, and assignments, encourage students to work independently and flexibly by selecting, testing, and interpreting relevant research, and applying understanding of critical thinking and creativity. Through these activities, students will begin to identify, develop and manage their own projects and document their progress through a learning log, or similar format. Learning logs are provided through OCA Spaces.

Students are expected to have a basic grasp of any software required for their course and to learn more complex usage as necessary as they progress. OCA provides students with G Drive online storage which includes word processing, presentation, drawing, and mind mapping tools. While OCA does not provide a help desk service to students for software, learning activities provide structured context for software learning at staged points throughout the course, and forums provide opportunities for peer support.

Learning is supported by tutors who provide timely, well-grounded and constructive formative feedback that aims to stretch and challenge learners at staged points within the unit. In parallel, tutor and student-led learning takes place through online group work. Group work offers opportunities to discuss and shape ideas, and share and support approaches to learning within video, webinar, study events, and/or forum activities and support. Critically reflecting on work through self-evaluation provides a valuable way for students to observe and learn from peers, to develop increasingly professional personal and graduate skills, and to develop a deepening recognition of subject boundaries. Students are encouraged to do this through their learning log, reflective assessment presentations, and by reflecting on formative feedback.

Student Services provide study planning and pastoral support for any student who requests it. This is available personally via telephone, online, or within student forums, or more generally through additional resources, signposted through OCA Learn and/or #weareoca.

Students will engage with a range of academic literature throughout the course, supported through library access and seminars. Essential and recommended reading lists have been selected for their academic currency, and from authors and practitioners across a range of viewpoints, ethnicities, identities, and cultures. All reading lists can be accessed through the digital library services and eBooks. Additional online texts and journals are also available via UCA’s online library. Students are supported through OCA’s Link Librarian via OCA Learn and #weareoca content and debate.

As students progress, their research will become more self-directed. Independent research and projects will be undertaken alongside a consideration of any ethical issues. Guidance, resources, and support for any external and/or collaborative projects are available through the Enterprise Hub and in discussion with tutors.

In addition to OCA's core support, OCA's Student Association (OCASA) provides opportunities for students to physically engage with cross-curriculum Study Events, asynchronous Virtual Study Events, or to become involved in wider student discussions or other events.

### Assessment Strategy

OCA's assessment strategy is based on an assessment for learning model which emphasises assessment *for* learning rather than assessment *of* learning. Therefore, assessment is seen as an integrated and meaningful part of the learning journey. Assessment outcomes encourage learners to critically reflect on their progress and to articulate ideas and outcomes effectively through appropriate presentation formats.

Assessment criteria focus on the extent to which knowledge of relevant concepts, practices, theories, and contexts are demonstrated, the level of understanding demonstrated through the testing and application of knowledge, and the degree to which knowledge and understanding are demonstrated through the application of technical, communication, personal, transferable, and graduate skills. To help articulate these, assessment criteria are presented at each level through a set of range statements.

Summative assessment can take place online or at a physical assessment event. Students will submit work in line with course assessment guidelines, and will be assessed through group marking overseen by the Programme Leader. Quality assurance is provided through moderation of marks, internal verification of the assessment process, parity checks to ensure grades are consistent across OCA, plagiarism checks, and scrutiny by External Examiners. Students will be provided with summative marks and feedback at the end of each unit.

### Costs of additional materials/resources

#### Software and digital equipment

As part of some units, students are required to use specialist applications. Students are responsible for sourcing and, where necessary, purchasing any additional software specified. Where possible, open or freeware equivalents will be discussed alongside industry standard options. Students are eligible for any student discounts on computer equipment and software.

#### Materials and resources

Students are responsible for sourcing and purchasing the materials, resources, and any additional equipment used in the production of their work. These costs will differ from student to student, depending on each student's area of focus.

#### Transportation of work

Students are responsible for any postage costs of work to/from tutors or OCA for formative feedback and/or assessment. OCA will charge students for any excess postage payable on work submitted for formal assessment which exceeds the maximum permitted weight. Alternatively, students can submit work digitally for free.

#### Learner Support Scheme

In line with OCA's Access and Participation Plan, the College continues to invest in schemes to improve engagement into creative arts from those from low socio-economic backgrounds through a bursary fund.

For further details on your specific course costs, please visit [www.oca.ac.uk](http://www.oca.ac.uk).

## Section F - Employability

OCA recognises that its current student body holds a broad range of employment and enterprise aspirations. Many students have established careers, see their studies as a change in direction, and for an increasing number of younger students, as a first step into a creative career. As distance learners, OCA students are located across the UK and internationally and consequently have differing levels of resources and opportunity. In order to provide meaningful and consistent educational experiences and outcomes for all of these students, OCA encourages students to interpret the concept of 'enterprise' in ways that are personally relevant to their particular aspirations, social contexts, and locations.

As a charity, OCA supports a curriculum that has a positive impact upon people's lives and society as a whole, and encourages engagement with enterprise that has a clear societal impact. This means undertaking external projects that can have a wider social benefit, and developing practices that are socially aware and environmentally sustainable.

To encourage this, learning materials and activities provides a framework for students to begin to define, establish and sustain their practices at a variety of scales and ambitions, and encourage students to think about freelance, employment, social enterprises, or entrepreneurship outcomes. A focus on research and ethics helps to frame these activities within wider social contexts. Students are also encouraged to undertake collaborative projects with other students, and to work on competition briefs or other external opportunities.

A key benefit of distance learning is in allowing self-sustaining ways of developing a creative practice to build over time, and by balancing study/work/life commitments. Students can establish studio spaces and build resources throughout their studies, to feel prepared and equipped at the end of their course. Therefore, enterprise related themes are embedded through the course to encourage this sustainable approach.

An Enterprise Hub will provide a central online resource to support self-directed student activities. The Hub will provide guidance and resources on key enterprise themes, such as establishing and undertaking external projects/work-related learning, working collaboratively, establishing business or enterprise opportunities such as external exhibitions, business plans, or social enterprises, and connecting to appropriate professional networks.

OCA will use the Enterprise Hub to help establish relationships with other organisations, businesses, and funding opportunities. These in turn will provide the potential for business incubators, mentoring options, internship opportunities and enable access to seed-funding for students.

### **Section G - 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 applicable national Subject Benchmarks and references the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

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 Surveys
- Feedback from Student Course Representatives