

Open College of the Arts

Wellbeing Policy

Introduction

Studying at higher level is key to enhancing social mobility. For many OCA students, distance learning is their only viable route into higher education. Distance learning brings its own risks, however, not least that of the isolation and insularity that can come from not studying on a campus with other students.

OCA has a duty of care to the mental and physical wellbeing students, tutors and staff which includes:

- promoting working and studying practices that make a positive impact on wellbeing
- taking action to reduce the risk and impact of working and studying practices with the potential to have a negative impact on mental and physical wellbeing.

This policy draws on best practice to define a framework that supports student, tutor and staff wellbeing.

The policy is a subsidiary policy of OCA's overarching **Equality & Diversity Policy**. It also works in conjunction with OCA's **Safeguarding Policy, Under 18s Admissions Policy** and **Anti-Harassment & Bullying Policy**. Download these policies from: [www.oca.ac.uk/about-oca/policies].

Student wellbeing

OCA aims to provide a learning environment that promotes health and wellbeing. OCA's *modus operandi* is to provide flexible courses that encourage students to have a healthy work/life balance.

It is for this reason that OCA undergraduate degrees are designed to be studied over a maximum of 12 years, four times longer than the average time permitted in UK higher education institutions for full-time students and up to double the higher education sector average for part-time study. Equally, Foundations are designed to be studied over a maximum of two years. This flexibility enables students to balance work, caring, family, study and other responsibilities effectively.

OCA recognises that isolation, with its associated consequences of low self-esteem and depression, is a risk for students. These issues can often be dealt with on an informal basis by talking with family, friends, or through seeking advice from OCA's student support services.

In order to limit the effects of isolation, OCA courses are designed to encourage collaboration with tutors and other students. This is achieved by online discussion

forums hosted on the OCA student site to encourage interaction between students within and across the creative disciplines studied at OCA. These forums are designed both to engage students in discussion about their course, the course content and their own personal practice, and also to act as a support network for students to discuss issues with their peer group. In addition, OCA runs study visits through OCASA, the OCA Student Association, throughout the academic year for students on particular courses and in particular regions. Study visits promote interaction between students and provide face-to-face contact.

OCA works to identify students deemed to be at risk in the early stages of their study, and to offer support to mitigate the risk. Heightened risk is identified through tutors' observations, lack of initial engagement by the student, the content of assignments submitted for assessment and other criteria as identified by OCA. Support offered is not mandatory, subject to heightened risk and associated procedures as detailed below.

Students have access to the full range of support services offered throughout their time with OCA, in particular through the Learner Support, Course Support and Student Advice teams. It's important to recognise, however, that OCA is a higher education provider and that there are limitations the level of support that can be provided by OCA staff. For this reason, OCA signposts students to professional services including helplines and counselling practitioners when appropriate.

OCA observes strict confidentiality of all student cases, and does not pass information about students to third parties without their permission. In cases where OCA has concerns about the mental or physical well-being of a student, OCA reserves the right through its duty of care to liaise with appropriate services including but not limited to counselling support and emergency services, and to provide such personal information to services as is required for them to provide effective services.