

Developing and supporting creative confidence in a distance learning environment.

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History and Background of OCA

OCA was founded in 1987 by Michael Young (Lord Young of Dartington, founder of the Open University and the Consumers Association) to offer the general public the chance to take high quality arts courses by distance learning without prior qualifications or restrictions. His vision was to transform people's lives giving them the opportunity and skills to express their creative talents under the guidance of professional artists.

Academic Rationale for Diploma in Higher Education Creative Arts

OCA offers learners access to a wide range of modules (courses) in the visual, performing and literary arts. There are currently 11 modules (courses) at level 1 and 12 modules (courses) at level 2 in these subject areas (accredited by the University of Glamorgan). About 2000 students enrol annually and a growing percentage of these students progress from level 1 to level 2 modules. Most of these progressing students have sought guidance in extending their studies in an appropriate pathway accumulating credits as they continue their development. In order to rationalise this offering the college has designed a programme that facilitates this development.

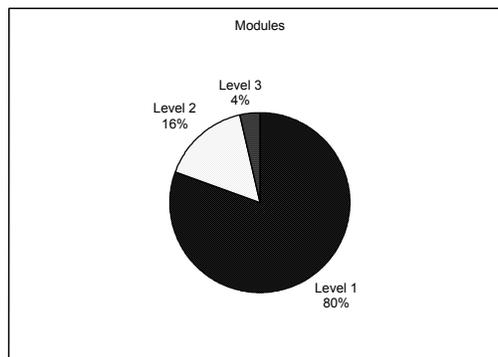
The programme designed aims to:

- facilitate acquisition of appropriate knowledge and understanding, development of the necessary personal attributes, and mastery of the essential skills which will equip and prepare students for continuing personal development and professional practice.
- enable students to develop independent critical thinking and judgement.
- provide an intellectually stimulating and satisfying experience of learning and studying.

This planned programme of level 1 and level 2 modules across the visual, performing and literary arts offers a unique opportunity for student development in the creative arts.

Evidence of market demand

The college currently has over 3500 students on programme.



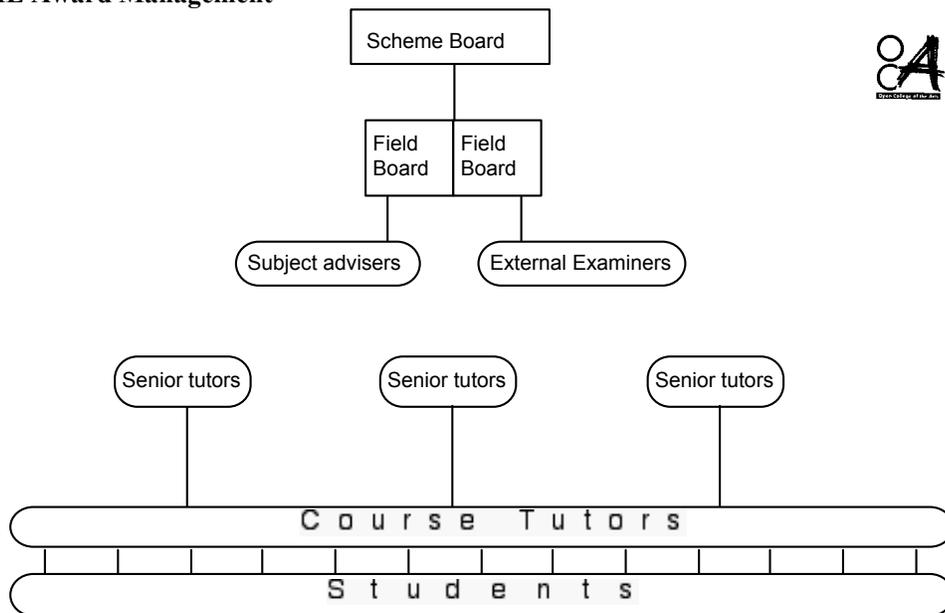
Most of these students separate into four distinct categories

- Students who return to learning later in their careers to extend their knowledge and understanding in creative arts.

- Students who cannot attend traditional institutions of learning – some have physical disabilities, some have learning difficulties (in some cases due to past location issues), others are in secure accommodation eg prisons.
- Students who do not wish to attend traditional institutions preferring distance learning methods to develop their skills (and confidence).
- Students who want to add more creative skills to their ongoing careers or add these new skills to change their existing ongoing careers.

Numerous case studies are available from past student successes that can be viewed either in college literature or via the college website (OCA galleries 2003)

DipHE Award Management



Due to the unique mode of delivery that the college has pioneered since its inception special considerations needed to be addressed to ensure the efficient management of the award:

- Student progress is monitored via a bespoke designed database.
- With over 250 tutors (across the whole of the UK) associated with the delivery of the programme - groups of tutors are mentored by senior tutors.
- An internal verification system that samples the assessment/tutorial feedback of the whole award.
- External examiner reports and assessments/grades are reviewed in the field boards.
- The scheme board reviews field board reports and subject adviser reports to ensure the efficient management of the award – action plans agreed on issues highlighted in the review.

Partnership issues

Partnerships developed with The University of Glamorgan, NIACE, Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit (DfES), Prisoners' Education Trust. These partnerships focus attention on accreditation, module length and module portability (inter-structural developments between these key areas).

Educational aims of the DipHE programme

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Intended learning outcomes of the DipHE programme

Knowledge and understanding

- Students can articulate and synthesise knowledge and understanding, attributes and skills in effective ways in the contexts of creative practice, employment, further study, research and self-fulfilment.
- Students can apply, consolidate and extend learning in different contextual frameworks and situations, both within and beyond the field of creative arts.

Learning and teaching methods:

- Course materials specially prepared for distance learning delivery.
- Students have a choice of face-to-face or postal tutorials with a personal tutor.
- Tutorials and independent study.

Means of assessment:

Formative and diagnostic

- Tutors prepare detailed feedback on assignments informing the student of their progress throughout the module.

Summative and evaluative

- All assignments are assessed against learning outcomes for each module and graded appropriately for each level.

Intellectual (thinking) skills

- Generate ideas, concepts, proposals, solutions or arguments independently in response to set briefs and/or as self-initiated activity.
- Critical evaluation, reasoning, logical argument, analysis and synthesis
- Employ both convergent and divergent thinking in the process of observation, investigation, speculative enquiry, visualisation and/or making.
- Inventiveness and creativity.
- Ability to draft and improve through redrafting creative work appropriately in a chosen genre.
- Critical skills in the close reading and analysis of texts.

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Professional/Vocational skills

- Develop a range of subject specific and transferable skills, including high-order conceptual, literacy and communication skills of value in graduate employment.
- Employ materials, media, techniques, methods, technologies and tools associated with the discipline(s) studied with skill and imagination whilst observing good working practices.

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Key/Common skills

- Self-management - the ability to study independently, set goals, manage their own workloads and meet deadlines.
- Critical awareness - the ability to analyse information and experiences, formulate independent judgements, and articulate reasoned arguments through reflection, review and evaluation.
- Skills in communication and presentation - the ability to articulate ideas and information comprehensibly in visual, oral and written forms.
- Information skills - the ability to source, navigate, select, retrieve, evaluate, manipulate and manage information from a variety of sources.

Programme structure (240 credit total)

- Level 1 (three 40 credit modules) chosen from 11 options
- Level 2 (two 60 credit modules) chosen from 13 options

Support for students and their learning

Student Handbook – includes detailed module description, assessment requirements and support appropriate to distance learning methods.

- All students have a personal tutor who deals with individual progress and support.
- Student Services advice for welfare, financial advice and special needs support.
- Course materials specially prepared for distance learning methods.
- Specially prepared course materials available for students with identified learning disabilities eg. dyslexia or similar forms of visual impairment.

Indicators of quality and standards

- The student will have presented evidence which demonstrates some ability to generate ideas independently and in response to set briefs and/or as self-initiated activity.
- This evidence will also demonstrate proficiency in observation, investigation, enquiry, visualization and/or making.
- Ideas will have been developed through to outcomes which confirm the student's ability to select and use materials, processes and environments.

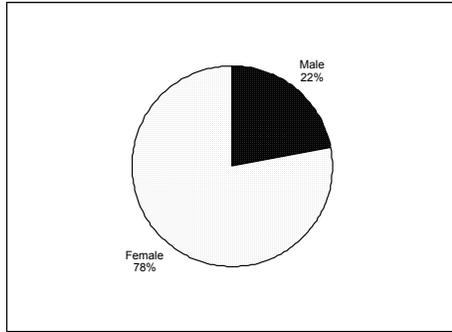
The student will have made connections between intention, process, outcome, context, and methods of dissemination.

Diversity issues

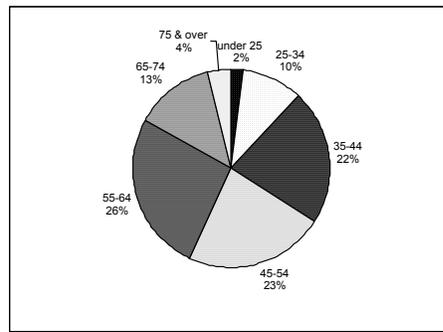
The traditional learner base augmented by new learners encouraging the wider participation of all those who do not have access to conventional learning opportunities (eg people with learning disabilities, the 'house-bound', inmates of secure institutions and those with little conventional experience of education).

Students

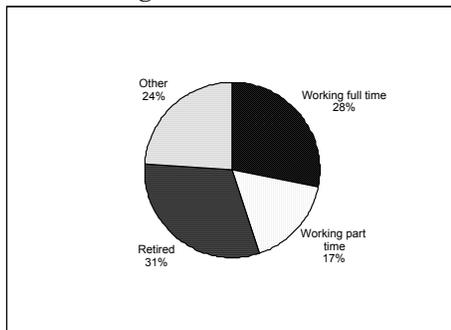
The student body is quite diverse. Although around 50% of students are middle class, middle aged women (50+), the college has had success in recruiting students with both physical and learning difficulties as well as those suffering from mental health problems. A number of students have come from within the prison system. 20% of students to date have come from Coalfields areas (8400). Around 30% of current tutors come from Coalfields areas. Overall, student satisfaction levels are good; there are low drop-out rates and many students continue their registration to repeat courses or to undertake additional courses.



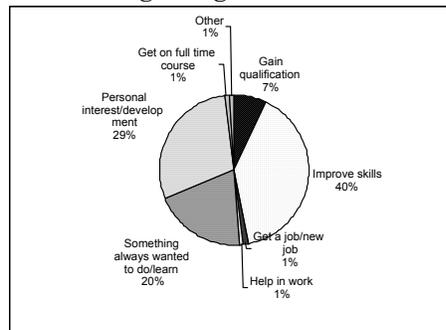
Student gender



Student Age range



Student Status



Main reasons for studying

ICT issues

Development of creative digital arts course - a unique programme encouraging learners to use computers in a creative way (the close linking of the arts and technology learning curriculum). This exciting new approach explores logical understanding and its relationship to creative development - increasing confidence in the learner.

Creative Digital Arts

Course Aims

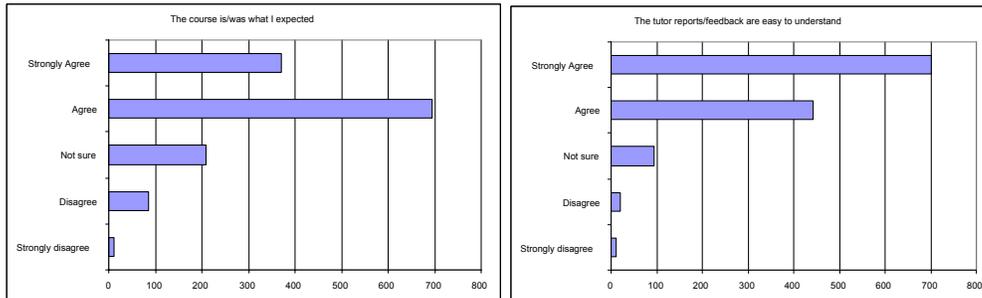
- Explore the potential of particular creative digital imaging software and computer hardware and its relevance to art and design
- Gain an understanding of the nature of digital scanning equipment and the limitations and capabilities of digital conversion
- Develop skills in image manipulation
- Develop artistic creativity

What students will have achieved by the end of the course

- Have gained an understanding of the creative digital imaging software and computer hardware introduced during the course and be able to use a computer creatively
- Have learned how to use a scanner and be creative with it using both 2-D and 3-D objects
- Be aware of the various output options for images, including printing and websites
- Have gained a knowledge of the painting techniques available and the importance of 'layers'
- Be aware of the different file types available and the various image compression techniques
- Have learned about colour theory and image manipulation, including image enhancement and applying filters
- Be aware of the different types of 'selection' that can be made and the effects of 'feathering' and distorting

- Have learned about image translation and the creative ways of working with more than one image
- Have gained an understanding of the techniques of tracing and using gradients and the special ways to work with ‘cloning’ and making patterns
- Have an understanding of the issues of copyright and how they could affect and protect work.

Student questionnaire results



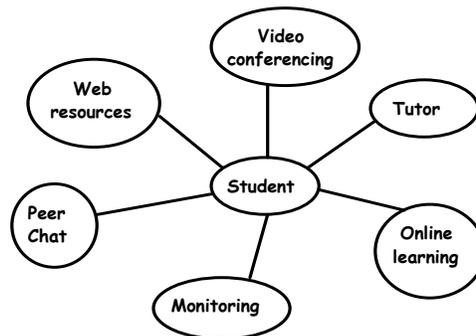
Pedagogy issues

- the development of online learning in an inline structure (approaches for the redevelopment of course materials).
- development of personal learning materials addressing individual learners’ needs.

A new approach in e-Learning?

Student centred e-Learning can make use of a wide range of technologies and media (delivery media and interaction tools).

Good e-Learning provision selects technologies from a variety of sources blending online with traditional offline technologies.



These methods seem to work well when used in traditional learning environments but fall short of being effective in distance learning.

How we learn? NLT – new learning technologies

“From the point of view of the cognitive psychology we remember:

- 10 % of what we read
- 20 % of what we hear
- 30 % of what we see
- 50 % of what we hear and see
- 70 % of what we say ourselves
- 90 % of what we do ourselves

Maximum efficiency is obtained where a program allows the users to become creative and use their initiative, that is, when they can act on what they are learning.” (Rollinghoff 2003)

Is Distance Education Effective?

“Many educators ask if distant students learn as much as students receiving traditional face-to-face instruction. Research comparing distance education to traditional face-to-face instruction indicates that teaching and studying at a distance can be as effective as traditional instruction, when the method and technologies used are appropriate to the instructional tasks, there is student-to-student interaction, and when there is timely teacher-to-student feedback” (CDLP 2003)

Programme of activities

All courses are run on a distance learning basis, largely postal with some offering the option of telephone conferencing and face-to-face tutorials/seminars. In addition to well designed course materials (course books, handouts, reading lists, practical exercises, videos etc) for all courses, OCA provides every student with a qualified and experienced personal tutor. Summer schools and short residential workshops are offered for some courses; others offer opportunities for the professional exhibition of student work.

Assessment methods

The assessment methods used in distance learning have a greater effect on achievement than on more traditional methods. There has been considerable research evidence to suggest that student performance can be improved by formative assessment. Black and Wiliam in their major review of research on assessment and learning suggest that formative assessment helps more if it concentrates on specific problems (giving a clear understanding of what is wrong) and achievable targets for putting it right.

‘Pupils who encounter difficulties and poor results are led to believe they lack ability, and this belief leads them to attribute their difficulties to a defect in themselves about which they cannot do a great deal. So they ‘retire hurt’, avoid investing effort in learning which could only lead to disappointment, and try to build up their self-esteem in other ways. Whilst the high-achievers can do well in such a culture, the overall result is to enhance the frequency and the extent of underachievement.’ (Black and Wiliam, 1998)

Students tend to regard assessment as grading (recording and tracking) what has been learned. This process can create confusion and lower self esteem – research evidence suggests that greater improvement can be achieved where only comments are used (a method the college has been using since 1987). Using student self assessment to engage them in their own learning can promote learning as long as it is more than just mechanical processes (tests etc). Students need to be helped to give them the right tools to assess their progress for themselves.

The college has always placed a great deal of importance to the use of formative assessment in the form of narrative feedback to student performance and student responses throughout the years have supported this method positively.

‘For formative assessment to be productive, students should be trained in self-assessment so that they can understand the main purposes of their learning and thereby grasp what they need to do to achieve.’ (Black and Wiliam, 1998)

Quality of feedback

The quality of feedback to students has long been recognised as important in raising performance. Research literature provides powerful evidence of the capacity of formative assessment to raise standards where students have a clear sense of themselves as learners, the goals they are trying to achieve and how to reach them.

The quality of feedback can be improved (feelings can block learning) - positive feedback can make students 'feel good' while not necessarily improving their work while negative feedback could make the student 'feel bad' and hinder learning.

Qualities of good assessment feedback

- provides prompt and regular feedback to students
- feedback that engages students in a dialogue about their performance
- focus the feedback on the learning outcomes and criteria for success

Adapting teaching materials

The college is currently carrying out a research project funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to evaluate distance learning and its development for disabled learners (including those with learning difficulties) and use in prisons. A recent meeting with DfES - Christine Fisher, Learning and Skills Adviser, Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit (responsibilities for the Arts) - was extremely revealing giving the college a unique insight into the possible problems of developing teaching materials for prisons. The findings matched some evidence discovered by Tony Uden, Senior Research Fellow, NIACE in his recent report Education and Training for Offenders. (Uden 2003)

- 25% to 40% of prisoner have some form of dyslexia contributing to their learning difficulties and in some cases short attention spans.
- Courses needed to be short and portable – one of the main disappointments that prisoners faced in her experience was starting courses that are abruptly terminated due to relocation. In some instances especially for long term servers there could be a large number of moves made making continuity difficult.
- Materials had to be 'prison proof' requiring some imaginative solutions – ie Black Plastic Boxes originally developed by the college for use in prisons would be a security risk as they could be cut up and used to breach locks (as a substitute for credit cards commonly used to force locks) and had other sinister uses associated with drug abuse.

The teaching materials need to be flexibly developed to allow the college to individually tailor the course to match the student.

- produced in various typographic formats suitable for print and screen
- ability to be cut up into smaller sections but allow continuity and progression

Guidelines for future developments in organisational structures in distance learning environment

Traditional structures

- learning delivered via a range of resources (lectures, practical work, libraries etc)
- programmes of study (whether full or part-time) are dependent on attendance and standardised tend to be inflexible.
- student records are held for the duration of a programme (usually 1 to 3 years).

Revised structures

- learning materials for online learning (inline structure keeping student learning in one place).
- programmes of study display portability and accumulative features (ability to learn according to own timetable).
- tracking of student progress can be over a very large number of years.

Black P, & Wiliam D. (1998) *Inside the Black Box*. London: Kings College of Education.

CDLP. (2003) *Is distance education effective?*. University of Idaho.
<<http://www.cdlponline.org/dlinfo/cdlp1/distance/home.html>>.

OCA Gallery. (2003) Open College of the Arts. <<http://www.oca-uk.com>>.

Rollinghoff, Andreas. (2003) *6 ways we learn*. New Learning Technologies. <<http://www.it-resources.icsa.ch/Pedagogie/RetentnE.html>>.

Uden, Tony. (2003) *Education and Training for Offenders*. NIACE policy discussion paper, Russell Press, Nottingham.