



The BFA Programme

Studio Teaching:
What's the general ratio of contact hours to independent studio work at the Ruskin?

Every student has a personal studio tutor with whom they meet with in the studio at least four times per term - tutorials generally last around 1 hour. Students will also meet with their tutor's whole tutor group regularly during each term. In addition, each year group has a dedicated year tutor who also arranges regular meetings.

The timetabled teaching hours you get each week differ from year to year. In first year you have two hours of History and Theory (plus a couple of essay tutorials each term) and then three hours of Anatomy.

From the second year, you continue with History & Theory, but don't continue with Anatomy (unless you choose to)

In addition to personal studio tutorials, we have group crits ('critiques'). The group crits take place twice weekly, usually 5 students present their work in a dedicated space for discussion with their peers. Each crit is facilitated by one or two tutors.

We also have one talk every week by a visiting speaker (usually an artist, curator, writer or other visual arts professional). As these talks can now take place online, we are able to invite guests from all over the world.

Students can also always call upon the advice and assistance from the Electronic Media Specialist and the Technicians at almost any time, usually without the need for an appointment. The Print Tutor is also in at least one day a week, and the Photography and Film Tutor arranges a series of sign-up sessions each term, and there are further specialist workshops each term.

There are many other opportunities for meetings and discussions, with Ruskin staff, both formal and informal, and many student-led whole School activities (recent examples include Ruskin Screenings, reading groups, group making sessions etc)

<p>Anatomy: Is it necessary to know a lot about anatomy in art before applying?</p>	<p>Student Rep: Not at all! When I came into the Ruskin I had no prior knowledge and this didn't disadvantage me one bit, in fact it was more exciting learning about it from scratch and with other people.</p>
<p>What does the human anatomy module entail?</p>	<p>Anatomy is compulsory for first years, and takes place every week for 3 hours. Obviously we had to make a lot of adjustments to teach it online during the pandemic. But you would normally expect it to be taught face-to-face. In the first and third terms, the course is mainly based in a large lecture/teaching studio, where students are taught about different systems in the body from an anatomical and artistic point of view. In the second term, students get unique access to the same dissection labs as medicine students, and work observationally from different specimens.</p> <p>Anatomy allows the first-years to discover a subject together as a cohort - they are not expected to become technical experts. Students use all media to present anatomy work, from drawing, sculpture, to video and performance. It is a theme to be explored physically, philosophically, existentially, thinking about the body we inhabit, and how that body inhabits in the world.</p>
<p>History & Theory: How much of the course is practical studio work and how much is academic (essays etc)?</p> <p>How big of a part does Art History/theory play in the course?</p>	<p>The History & Theory of Visual Culture makes up 25% of the BFA programme.. In the first and second years, students attend a lecture and a seminar each week; recent modules have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium • Art and Emotion • Contemporary Art and the Monument: (Re)Constructing History • Unlearning Whiteness • Feminism and the Artist's Body • Globalisation and Photography <p>History and Theory is assessed by course work in the first two years (one essay per term).</p> <p>In the final year students work on an extended essay (a dissertation of sorts) on a topic of their choice and with close supervision from one of our tutors. With the extended essay we really encourage our students to delve into a subject that complements/informs their practice — the emphasis throughout the degree is on how conceptual ideas help frame and articulate their practice.</p>



<p>Specialisms:</p> <p>I am particularly interested in illustration / animation / manga - is it possible to explore either of these as part of the course?</p> <p>[see also: ceramics, textiles, large-scale metal casting/forging]</p> <p>Is a career in animation a viable option after completing this course?</p>	<p>A Fine Art degree is often about discovering your own voice within the wide spectrum of Contemporary Fine Art practice, so an openness to a range of ways of both making and understanding is key to the course.</p> <p>There is no set model for a practice within The Ruskin. Students investigate different media and subject matter, including illustration/animation / manga/comics. Some students continue with a very focused approach using a certain media or subject matter, while others embrace a wide variety of approaches.</p> <p>We are not, however, an animation school and do not offer specialist tuition in this area - our tutors are practicing artists, art historians and theorists, not from animation. A critical engagement with the processes and debates around international contemporary art is key to this course and students are encouraged to research and experiment fully in their area of work and to look beyond it.</p> <p>Students often leave making very different work to when they started the course. And many of our fine art graduates go on to work in many creative fields, including design, fashion, film, game- and app-deisgn and advertising.</p>
<p>I feel like the Ruskin prefers people who do more abstract / conceptual works. Am I at a disadvantage if my pieces are more representational?</p>	<p>Students at The Ruskin make work that covers the broad spectrum of contemporary Fine Art, in all media and subject matter, including representational painters. What they need to bring to their practice is critical engagement with the processes and debates around international contemporary visual cultural, which is key to this course. Students are encouraged to research and experiment fully in their area of work and to look beyond it, and their preferred medium and mode of practice may change radically from the start to the end of their studies.</p>



Colleges and Fine Art

<p>I noticed that some colleges have fellows associated with fine art and others don't. How would the tutorial process work in that case?</p>	<p>Unlike the teaching in Oxford of most other (and especially Humanities) subjects, Fine Art tutorial teaching does not take place in college, but entirely in the Ruskin.</p> <p>Over the course of their degree, students have tutorials in their studios with both our fine art fellows (who are also associated with a college) and our very experienced Visiting Tutors; likewise, History and Theory tutorials also take place with Ruskin tutors, not in college.</p> <p>(Most students meet termly with a college tutor just for updates about their progress and wellbeing.)</p>
<p>Do you know if there are any particular colleges that are more accommodating to fine art students?</p> <p>Are you more likely to get in to some colleges than others?</p>	<p>Please see our website for the colleges which accept Fine Art students: https://www.rsa.ox.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/bfa-affiliated-colleges</p> <p>You will not gain an advantage, or suffer a disadvantage, by applying to one college or another. All applications are considered together at shortlisting, by panels composed of Ruskin tutors, rather than individually by college, in order that the strongest candidates are invited to interview, irrespective of the college of application.</p> <p>Shortlisted candidates are all interviewed by a Ruskin interview panel, and the Ruskin will ensure that highly-ranked candidates are offered an interview at a second (or even third) college if their college of application cannot offer places to all of its strongest applicants. So occasionally, successful candidates may be offered a place at a different college to the one to which they originally applied.</p>
<p>Would it be a disadvantage or an advantage to be the only student taking fine art in your college?</p>	<p>Student Rep: I feel like there are pros and cons to being the only fine art student in your year at college. I go to St John's, and this is the only college that accepts one student per year. All the others accept two or more, with St Edmund Hall taking up to 6! For me, I was worried about being the only art student, but it's actually been fine. I'm very close with the art students in older years, and students in other subjects too. Plus, because almost all art stuff is done in Ruskin rather than at college, I find it doesn't make much of a difference to me, it's just a slightly different experience.</p>



Qualifications

<p>Subjects:</p> <p>Which A-levels do you recommend to take?</p>	<p>Art A-level is preferred (but not essential, we have had successful candidates coming with all science A-levels but who nonetheless had submitted outstanding portfolios); you will also need to demonstrate that you have the critical and essay writing skills for the rigorous academic nature of study at Oxford. But otherwise we'd advise you take subjects about which you are passionate, because those are the ones you do will excel in.</p>
<p>Grades:</p> <p>My expected grades are ABBB, is this too low? I think i will achieve higher and i think my portfolio is strong but is that irrelevant without the grades?</p>	<p>I'm afraid to say that Oxford's entrance requirements are AAA; The Ruskin will consider applicants with a post-A-level foundation diploma, if they have an OUTSTANDING portfolio, with AAB at A-level, so if you achieve AAB and go onto the a foundation, your application will be competitive.</p>
<p>International qualifications:</p> <p>Hi, I'm from Canada [or other non-UK country]. Have you ever had Fine Art students from where I come from? If so what were they're qualifications?</p>	<p>Every year we have overseas students; from Canada to New Zealand, Korea to Brazil. Please check the central University Admissions site for information about international qualifications.</p> <p>https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/for-international-students/international-qualifications</p>



Foundation Diplomas

<p>Do you prefer students to have completed a foundation degree?</p>	<p>Admissions team: We do strongly recommend a Foundation, as it gives candidates a chance to expand their work, learn with new skills and develop their understanding about what it is to be able to practice art full-time. It means when they start their degree programme, they can hit the ground running, already equipped with skills and ideas. Candidates can find out if they are as an artist – for example, if they discover they love working with ceramics or textiles, then the Ruskin probably isn't for them, as we don't have specialist facilities or experts in those areas.</p> <p>Ruskin's Senior Technician: A foundation can better prepare you for your time studying for a Fine Art degree, not just in developing your fine art practice but also giving you a chance to fully submerge yourself in art 24/7. This is something you will not get to do whilst at school.</p> <p>My experience from my foundation course was that some people found that they wanted to keep art as a hobby and not a career choice. It should also give you a chance to find out which "branch" of art you want to take. I started my foundation with the belief that I was going to be a graphic designer but I was allowed to work clay, plaster and welders for the first time and decided after just 4 weeks that I wanted to be a sculptor instead.</p> <p>Student Rep: I would personally really recommend a foundation year, just to develop your art skills and independent working. I found having done a foundation so valuable when I first joined Ruskin, as I was able to just get on making art independently and hit the ground running, more so than I would have been able to do if I'd come straight from A Levels. There is a big difference that comes just from having had the opportunity to do art full time for the first time in your life.</p>
<p>Do you prefer certain foundation courses and schools over others?</p>	<p>Contrary to some rumours on StudentRoom etc, we have absolutely no preference about foundation courses or colleges: successful applicants have come from foundation courses at their local FE college (Bridgend to Carlisle) as well as more dedicated art colleges (London to Leith).</p>



<p>What is the ratio of A Level students and foundation students for the past three years?</p> <p>Are prospective students who have done a Foundation Course more successful in their application?</p>	<p>With such a small intake each year (max. 30 places) it's hard to give a representative statistic / ratio. But on average, of the UK students, in any one year between 60-80% have completed a foundation course - usually the higher end of that spectrum.</p> <p>While we highly recommend doing a post-A-level foundation course before starting on the BFA programme, there are always some successful candidates each year who come straight from their A-levels (or equivalent). But we also advise many applicants each year that while they show great promise, we recommend they take a foundation course before re-applying - and often candidates are successful thereafter.</p>
<p>As you recommend the foundation degree, do i apply after i have got it, or apply and defer(if i'm accepted)</p>	<p>We realise that the Oxford admissions cycle takes place when most foundation courses have only just started. You can apply while on a foundation course: if you were then offered a place on the BFA programme, it would be on condition that you complete your foundation and achieve at least a merit. Or you can apply in the October AFTER completing your foundation course for entry the following year.</p> <p>With so few places each year (max. c. 30), we cannot offer deferred places (other than in exceptional eg health/medical , circumstances). So if you were offered a place straight after your A-levels, but wanted nonetheless to do a foundation course before starting your degree, you would need to re-apply the following year.</p> <p>I usually advise that if you are applying for Fine Art degree programmes straight from A-levels, that you apply at the same time for foundation courses, so that if you don't get a place on your preferred degree course, you can start a foundation before re-applying – a belt-and-braces approach.</p>
<p>Did most international students do a foundation course?</p>	<p>We realise that it's difficult for overseas students to undertake foundation courses of the type offered in the UK, but any opportunity to undertake full-time art studies (rather than it being just one amongst a number of your High School subjects) before undertaking a Fine Art degree will help prepare a candidates better in terms of artistic development, breadth of engagement and focus.</p>



UCAS application and personal statement

<p>What's the relative weighting between portfolio and personal statement? Which is deemed more important.</p>	<p>The Portfolio of work is the main element of the admission's process. It is your work and independence of thought beyond the briefs of courses at school, college or foundation, that we are looking for. The personal statement is a good way of giving further information around your practical work and giving us extra context to your interests and the questions within your work.</p>
<p>Do you have any advice for writing a personal statement? Do you prefer experience or would you rather we talk about artists and areas of interest?</p>	<p>We want to find out who you are intellectually and artistically, about what informs your practice and ideas, which could be artistic adventures, or other experiences and encounters you've had, and/or inspiration from other artists, and what questions you have been and would like to explore through your art.</p>
<p>When applying, should i try to learn about art history and theory, or mention any historical influences in my personal statements? Or should i just be optimistic to learn?</p> <p>Could you recommend any further reading for a fine art student?</p>	<p>While you do not need to have specialist knowledge of art history/theory before applying, we do want to see evidence of critical skills that will enable you to fully engage with the History&Theory component of the degree. We would encourage you to read widely around artworks/artists/exhibitions that interest you, particularly if it bears on your artistic practice, and to familiarise yourself with key debates in contemporary art.</p> <p>The Tate website has excellent information on specific artists/movements/objects and could be a good starting point in preparation for applying. We would also recommend having a look at art journals like Frieze, Artforum or Art Monthly, as well as online resources like The White Review or The New Inquiry. Some of the books we suggest looking at before starting the degree include 'Contemporary Art' by Julian Stallabrass and 'What Is Contemporary Art?' by Julieta Aranda.</p>
<p>Will a member of the Ruskin staff or a non subject specific college tutor who initially reads my application?</p>	<p>Your application is assessed entirely by the Ruskin tutors</p>



Portfolio

Does the portfolio have to contain 20 works? It takes me a really long time per piece, and I wouldn't want to submit something just to bulk up my portfolio.

The 20 works for the portfolio is a guideline for the maximum number of works. Depending how you work, you may wish to include images of works in progress or the development of larger projects. There is certainly no requirement to include 20 works. The portfolio is a space for you to show us your strongest work and is used as the basis for discussion at interview, so should demonstrate what you are most interested in as a prospective student and the questions you are asking.

What type of work do you like to see in portfolios? Would you rather a selection of different varied work or different pieces showing development over time?

How important is it to demonstrate use of a wide range of materials within your application portfolio?

There is no set model for a successful applicant's portfolio. Students at the Ruskin work across the full range of media within contemporary Fine Art practice. The School is looking for students who are fully engaged in their work and who are beginning to find their own voice outside of the confines of briefs from school, college or foundation curricula. The portfolio is a place for you to show what most excites and intrigues you within your work and what questions you may have around particular medium or subject matter.

If you are excited and engaged in working with a range of materials then you should include this in your portfolio. An openness to a range of media and knowledge of contemporary practices is key to this course at the Ruskin and students often end up graduating making very different work from when they started.

It is for you to show us what you believe is your strongest work and forms the basis of the interview, so it is for you to decide what represents you and your interests best.



<p>What do you mean by 'mature work'? Does it imply that a piece should be technically good, shows potential & creativity, or has a good idea behind it?</p>	<p>Maturity can come through in a variety of ways - these include evidence of discipline to work independently, beyond A' level, IB or foundation briefs. We are definitely interested in creativity, this might be shown in how you develop ideas and try out different approaches in your work, perhaps connecting with interests you have e.g. music, sport, fashion, gallery visits, documentaries (this list is endless).</p> <p>Technicality is valued but is not our highest test - skills can be developed here as a student with access to technical facilities, experienced technicians and tutors.</p>
<p>How much of development and written work from sketchbooks should be included within the digital portfolio in comparison to practical, resolved work?</p>	<p>It is really up to you how you edit the content of your portfolio: you may want to include PDFs showing sketchbooks etc, as well as documentation (images, moving image files) of completed work.</p>
<p>Are there any portfolio examples that we are able to see eg on YouTube/ the website?</p>	<p>All portfolios are unique to the applicant and there is no set model for a successful format. However, we do recommend including unique work which you have made outside any school curriculum project – if you only make work based on the A-level curriculum, your portfolio may share a lot of similar content as other candidates.</p>
<p>Does a piece have to have a complex and deep meaning behind it? Will I be judged if I don't have a profound reason behind my piece?</p>	<p>Not at all; quite a lot of our students work quite intuitively. But we do want to find candidates who are intellectually and artistically curious, who have thought about what informs their practice and ideas, which could be experiences and/or inspiration from other artists – we don't expect students to have all the answers but we do like to know what questions they are exploring in their art.</p>
<p>Who should write my reference,? My teacher at my foundation course or A-levels?</p>	<p>We would suggest whoever knows you as an artist best</p>



Interviews and Practical Test

<p>How many students are selected for the interview? And can I only be accepted if I received merits on my foundation year?</p>	<p>We invite between 50 and 60 students for interview from the initial portfolio submission.</p> <p>While the quality of the work in the portfolio is central to the admissions procedure, we would expect you to achieve / have achieved a merit on your foundation course.</p>
<p>What is the practical test for applying like?</p> <p>Can we have some insight on the practical test? or an example of a brief? How long is it?</p> <p>I was told by colleges that the interviews would be online, is this the same for Fine Art, how would the practical test work?</p>	<p>The University of Oxford has just announced that interviews in the admissions cycle 2021 for entry in 2022 will take place remotely, so there won't be a practical test this year.</p> <p>However, customarily, the practical test takes place in the High Street studios, and lasts 3 hours: candidates chose from one of three questions or statements to make an artistic response to. Candidates cannot bring their own materials: we provide materials including paper, pencils, pens, charcoal, glue, masking and sellotape, string, armature wire, Mod-Roc etc.</p> <p>Student Rep: The practical test is really fun and it is really nice to work with other students in the same room. For mine, there were 3 quite broad and open questions to choose from. From my memory, my prompts were 'draw a window, or something like a window', 'two robots embracing' and one other I can't remember. So you can see they're very loose and really just a jumping off point to make something and show how you think and your working process a little bit. I just did a bunch of little experiments and tests exploring one question, and explained what I was thinking and other things I might have done based on the prompt if I'd had more time</p>
<p>What kind of questions could be asked during the interview?</p>	<p>The interview is a forum for you to discuss your current work, to show us what most excites you and how you feel the course may help you to develop your artistic practice. There are no set questions as everybody's portfolio will be very different and this forms the basis of the discussion. You would also be asked to bring new work to the interview to be discussed in relation to the works in the portfolio and how this may develop were you to study at the Ruskin.</p>



<p>What should be expected from an interview?</p>	<p>It would be with 3 or 4 members of The Ruskin staff and we would have your portfolio there as a basis for the discussion, along with new work you would be invited to bring. It is an open discussion around you and your work, also in the wider context of contemporary fine art practice. They usually last 15-20 minutes.</p>
<p>What would you say sets a successful applicant apart from an unsuccessful one?</p>	<p>We are looking for individuals who show an independence of thought and creativity, who are beginning to develop their own language within their practice</p> <p>Successful applicants tend to be making work that goes beyond the taught structure or briefs within schools, colleges and foundation courses.</p>
<p>Ruskin sites and facilities</p>	
<p>How far from the city centre is the Ruskin's main building?</p>	<p>The High Street building is right in the city centre, and the Bullingdon Road building is 10-15 mins walk (quicker by bike) in multi-cultural East Oxford</p>
<p>On the Ruskin's website, there are two addresses mentioned: 74 High Street and 128 Bullingdon Road. Is one for studio work and the other for theoretical study?</p>	<p>Both sites have studio spaces but are slightly different in the facilities they have. High Street has studios for all first years, as well as an art library, seminar and tutorial rooms, and some shared studio spaces. Bullingdon Road is where most second and third years have their studios, as well as having a large exhibition/ shared working space, digital facilities and sculpture and print workshops.</p>

To see examples of recent work by Ruskin students, please see the following links:

- **Callout:** BFA finalists degree show
- **Primordial Soup: An** exciting blend of artworks, freshly procured from the Ruskin's current BFA first years.
- **Isolation Exhibition 2020:** An exhibition of work by a selection of Ruskin's current BFA first years made during Isolation.
- <https://www.instagram.com/ruskinschoolofart/>

