



*Kate Kirby is a tutor for the Open College of Arts.*

There is no doubt that Argyll is a stunningly picturesque place that has appealed to artists for centuries.

There are plenty of them around these days too and anyone who is thinking of developing their skills in that direction might consider taking a course with the Open College of the Arts (OCA).

The OCA is affiliated to the Open University and offers a whole range of courses which enable students to study in their own home at their own pace, with the support and encouragement of a tutor.

'It is a great option for people in rural situations who don't wish to leave home to study, or who want to fit it in around other commitments,' says Kate Kirby, an artist living in Oban who has been an OCA tutor for 8 years. At the moment Kate has about 60 students who come from a whole range of backgrounds. They have a choice of distance learning or face-to-face tuition.

Kate said: 'My students live all over the country, and even abroad. Their expectations vary: some want to use the course as a preparation for further study or to gain credit towards a degree, but the majority are studying for their own pleasure - maybe drawing is something they've always wanted to do but haven't got round to, or they used to paint when they were younger, but have lost confidence.

'Having the structure of the course really helps them to focus and develop their work.

'The variety of students makes it interesting for me - I never know what will be inside that tube or envelope!

'It is very satisfying to see how someone's work can change and move on in quite a short time.'

Over the years Kate has taught in a range of situations including schools, workshops and art galleries and she believes the OCA course books are an excellent resource for the student.

Kate added: 'They are very clearly written and demystify the process of learning to draw and paint. In fact I wish I'd read them before I went to Art College! Each course contains a number of assignments and my role is to write a report on each finished assignment, and also to be there at the end of the phone or e-mail to help with any questions and offer encouragement when needed. You really do build an individual relationship with each student.'

All the O.C.A. tutors are practically involved in the subjects they teach. Kate is currently working on a series of paintings based on the landscape around Ganavan, which will be exhibited at Kilmartin Museum during the summer.

More information on the OCA is available on the website [www.oca-uk.com](http://www.oca-uk.com) or phone 01226 730 495 for a brochure.

Kate's work can be seen at her website [www.kate-kirby.com](http://www.kate-kirby.com)