



# Safeguarding Policy

## Protecting children and vulnerable adults

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Version number: 1.2	Approved by: Safeguarding Steering Group
Effective from: July 2019	Date for review: July 2020

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.

## Summary of policy

This policy describes how The Open University meets its statutory safeguarding obligations to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults. Safeguarding concerns may emerge about the safety and wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults associated with students, staff or other business activities during the course of Open University business. This policy outlines the procedure to follow if you have a safeguarding concern and how decisions are made.

**Note:** Terminology in this document takes into account legislation of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and refers to ‘children’ as those under 18 years of age and ‘vulnerable’ adults or groups as those also recognised as ‘protected’ or ‘at risk of harm’.

**If you are concerned about the welfare or safety of a child or vulnerable adult, you can contact our Safeguarding Referrals Team by email [safeguarding-referrals@open.ac.uk](mailto:safeguarding-referrals@open.ac.uk).**

### Summary of significant changes since last version

- a) Updated legislation references
- b) Inclusion of guidance and reporting forms relating to what to do if you are concerned about the safety or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult.
- c) Inclusion of reference to safeguarding policy annex of the Open University International Development Office for overseas projects.
- d) Inclusion of section 5.4 in Appendix B regarding third party information requests.

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### Policies superseded by this document

This document updates the previous version of the Policy for ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable adults at The Open University, dated March 2016.

## Scope

### What this document covers

This policy and its related procedures apply to:

- All current and prospective students under 18 years old (or under 16 years old in Scotland) including the Apprenticeship Programme.
- Vulnerable adults registered as students or prospective students.
- Staff in the course of their duties (including postgraduate research students, and staff connected with [International Development Office](#) business.
- External organisations/individuals engaged with official Open University activities.
- All children/vulnerable adults with a connection to The Open University business directly or indirectly.

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## What this document does not cover

- Students or staff experiencing mental health difficulties who may pose a risk to themselves or others but are not vulnerable adults or under 18 years old and do not pose a safeguarding risk. Those in this position can access support via
  - Students: [Your Student Support Team](#) or [StudentHome](#)
  - Staff: Your manager; and/or People Services, who may refer you to the Employee Assistance Programme.
- Students who may be in prison or in a secure environment and are under the remit of the Students in Secure Environments team. For more information, see our [Supporting Students in Secure Environments](#) website.
- Specific Open University study programmes, research and placements with employers overseen by faculties which involve contact with children and young people, and which have work-based safeguarding policies and procedures, such as Social Work, Nursing and apprenticeships. If you have a concern connected to these areas, please refer to the safeguarding policy for the work placement setting.

## Related Documentation

### Other documentation relevant to safeguarding at The Open University include:

- [Admission of applicants under the age of 18](#)
- [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#)
- [Fitness to Practise Procedure](#)
- [Information Security Policy Set](#)
- [Student Computing Policy](#) - includes usage of software and social media (Appendix 3)
- [Social Media Policy](#) (internal document)
- [Policy for ensuring the safeguarding of children overseas for the International Development Office](#) (internal document)
- [Open University Prevent Principles](#)
- [Whistleblowing Policy](#)

The Open University recognises and implements its duty of care in ensuring a safe study environment in accordance with current safeguarding legislation and guidance in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

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## **This policy is informed by legislation and guidance including:**

- [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019](#)
  - [Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2019](#)
  - [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#)
  - [Special educational needs and disability \(SEND\) code of practice: 0-25 years – Statutory guidance 2014](#)
  - England:  
[Working together to safeguard children](#) A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, March 2018
  - [The Care Act 2014](#)
  - Scotland:  
[National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2014](#)
  - Northern Ireland:  
[Co-operating to Safeguarding Children and Young People in Northern Ireland](#)
  - Wales:  
[Safeguarding Children – Working Together Under the Children Act 2004](#)  
[Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014](#)
  - [Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006](#)
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## **The Open University Student Charter Principles**

This policy aligns with the following [Open University Student Charter](#) Principles:

- Principle 1: We treat each other with dignity and respect

## **Introduction**

The Open University respects that all individuals regardless of race, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation, family status, age or social background have a right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse.

Protecting people's health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, exploitation, victimisation, abuse, neglect, sexual misconduct and violence is fundamental to creating a safe learning environment. In turn, these experiences impact on the working and learning experiences of those directly, or indirectly, affected by such behaviours.

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Abusive behaviours can take many forms, including, but not limited to

- Physical abuse
- Emotional or psychological abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Domestic abuse
- Financial abuse
- Discriminatory abuse
- Modern slavery

The Director, Academic Services, is the Designated Safeguarding Officer for The Open University. They have overall responsibility for the safety of vulnerable groups in accordance with relevant and current legislation in each of the countries of the UK and are accountable for The Open University’s practice.

The Safeguarding Steering Group has oversight of all safeguarding matters and issues relating to protection within the Open University and assists the Director, Academic Services, in fulfilling the institution’s responsibilities as outlined in this Policy.

# Policy

## 1. Policy principles

- 1.1 Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility; we are committed to creating and sustaining a culture of vigilance among our staff and students to recognise, respond, record and report safeguarding concerns and provide a proportionate response.
- 1.2 It is not our responsibility to make judgements about safeguarding concerns reported, but to ensure they are processed and referred on, as appropriate.
- 1.3 Information and data received as part of safeguarding concerns are handled in confidence and on a need-to-know basis, and in accordance with the privacy notice described in Appendix B.
- 1.4 Wherever possible or appropriate, we seek the consent of the subject of a safeguarding concern in order to share their information with an external agency, for example, a social services department.
- 1.5 This safeguarding policy is updated in line with changes to relevant legislation and best practice across the sector, in addition to the annual policy review cycle.

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# Procedure

## 2. What to do if you are concerned about the safety or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult

Someone may disclose something which triggers your concern in a variety of settings, such as in a conversation, in a written assignment or a posting on a forum.

- Listen to what they are saying to you calmly so as not to make them more anxious.
- Respect the person's right to privacy but do not promise confidentiality - say that you may have to pass on information if a child or vulnerable person is at significant risk of harm.
- Reassure the person that they have done the right thing in telling you this information.
- Make notes as soon as you can, using the exact words that you can remember.
- If you are concerned that a child/young person/vulnerable adult is in possible **IMMEDIATE** danger, please take action to ensure their safety by contacting the Emergency Services by telephoning 999.
- Fill in the form in Appendix A and email the contents detailing your concern to and your contact details to [Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk](mailto:Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk). If you are unable to fill in the form or send an email, the form can be printed out and posted in hard copy to

Deborah Peat  
Head of Strategy and Quality Development, Academic Services  
1st Floor, West Wing  
Frank Henshaw Building  
The Open University  
Hammerwood Gate  
Milton Keynes  
MK7 6BY

### Open University staff

You should report details of your concern to a line manager, if possible, at the earliest opportunity and then email basic information and your contact details to [Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk](mailto:Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk).

### Open University students or other associates:

If you are concerned about the risk to a child/young person/vulnerable adult and **do not think they are in immediate danger**, email basic information and your contact details to [Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk](mailto:Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk).

You may also wish to discuss your concerns with the Open University Students Association ([oustudents-support@open.ac.uk](mailto:oustudents-support@open.ac.uk))

Fill in more details on the safeguarding referral form in [Appendix A](#) and post it in hardcopy with your contact details to the above address.

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The Safeguarding Referrals Team will respond within 24 hours during office hours. They may require further information from the person who has made the initial referral.

- The Safeguarding Referrals Team will seek advice regarding further action required. Following advice they will refer, if necessary, to the relevant child protection agency, adult protection team or the police.
- A member of the Safeguarding Referrals Team may report back to you and your line management on action taken, as appropriate.

2.1 The Safeguarding Steering Group oversees safeguarding policy; a designated safeguarding officer and a trained Safeguarding Referrals Team process reports of concerns raised and make referrals to external agencies, where appropriate. Safeguarding awareness training is made available to all staff and relevant parties involved in The Open University's business.

2.2 The Open University has safeguarding protocols in place which are coordinated and implemented consistently through its Safeguarding Referrals Team across the institution.

2.3 The Safeguarding Referrals Team records all queries received via [safeguarding-referrals@open.ac.uk](mailto:safeguarding-referrals@open.ac.uk) and verify details where appropriate, in order to refer concerns to external agencies, such as social services.

2.4 The Safeguarding Referrals Team makes available information, advice, guidance and training on what to do in the event of a safeguarding concern arising, and this is quality-assured on a regular basis. All University staff are made aware of the institution's commitment to the safety of vulnerable/protected groups and are directed to guidance about what to do if a concern arises via this policy.

2.5 Senior management across the four UK nations are given training (and periodic refresher training) to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to provide advice and guidance about safeguarding issues and to assist with referring to and working with external agencies. Support and advice are offered to staff if/when such matters arise.

2.6 All relevant partner organisations and individuals associated with Open University business are made aware of The Open University's statutory safeguarding duty and the safeguarding referral process (see [Section 2](#), above, What to do if you are concerned about the welfare or safety of a child or vulnerable adult).

2.7 The Open University works in partnership with the Open University Students Association to promote the safety of children and vulnerable adults.

2.8 The Safeguarding Steering Group anticipates and responds to external and internal developments and ensures that the Open University can be accountable for safeguarding and protecting vulnerable groups.

2.9 Safeguarding best practice in the higher education sector as a whole is reviewed regularly via the Safeguarding Steering Group to ensure a consistency of approach, procedures and actions to lead to a safe culture within Open University settings.

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- 2.10 The Open University has a statutory duty regarding the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism. If there is reason to believe that a student may be at risk of being drawn into terrorism, any action taken under this policy will be taken in consultation with [The Open University Prevent Co-ordinator](#).
- 2.11 Students or staff of The Open University who may have concerns about irregularities in Open University business can bring this to the attention of management according to [Whistleblowing Procedures and Guidance](#).
- 2.12 The Open University makes all reasonable efforts, through its recruitment procedures, to ensure that all members of staff whose role involves specific activity with children and/or vulnerable adults have no known history of harmful behaviour and are suitable for the position in line with policy and legislation requirements. This includes both full-time and part-time staff, paid and/or unpaid, and Associate Lecturers and postgraduate researchers.
- 2.13 The Safeguarding Referrals Team administers Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks on all members of staff involved in safeguarding referrals, as appropriate.

### **3. Allegations against staff**

- 3.1 Any allegations of abuse involving a member of staff will be taken seriously by The Open University. A student can report an allegation about a member of staff to the OU Students Association ([oustudents-support@open.ac.uk](mailto:oustudents-support@open.ac.uk)) or the Safeguarding Referrals Team ([Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk](mailto:Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk)) which will then be referred to People Services and external agencies, as appropriate.
- 3.2 Any member of staff who has a concern about abuse by another member of staff should report their concern to an appropriate senior manager, who will follow the University's safeguarding and disciplinary procedures and refer the matter to People Services (as in 3.1, above).

### **4. Students under the age of 18**

- 4.1 The Open University is mindful that some modules may contain material or require work experience in a particular field which is unsuitable for students who are under the age of 18 and that some modules leading to professional qualifications may stipulate minimum requirements relating to age. The Open University has procedures in place to help children who are considering applying to study according to the [Admission of Applicants under the age of 18](#). In some circumstances, The Open University will consider whether there is an alternative learning experience available for the applicant under 18.
- 4.2 No images in any format will be circulated or stored by staff involving students under the age of 18 without first gaining explicit written informed consent of those involved and their parents/guardians/carers. Online conduct and principles are set out in the Open University's [Student Computing Policy](#).

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## 5. Data protection

- 5.1 Under The Open University's Statutory Safeguarding duty, Open University staff must report any safeguarding concerns to the Safeguarding Referrals Team. Whilst measures will be taken to protect individuals' privacy on a need-to-know basis, confidentiality levels will be managed as outlined in Appendix B, because of the requirement to report safeguarding concerns to the Safeguarding Referrals Team and for the team to then investigate any reported concerns.
- 5.2 The Safeguarding Referrals Team keep electronic records of referrals/concerns securely and confidentially on a restricted server and in hardcopy with restricted access, in accordance with data protection guidelines. Data held is retained for a specified period and is shared on a need-to-know basis according to the Safeguarding Privacy Notice – see [Appendix B](#).

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## 6. Implementation and enforcement of procedure

- 6.1 Safeguarding is a statutory duty of The Open University's business, and, as such, there is no flexibility or exemption to this policy. The Safeguarding Steering Group oversees safeguarding policy and the Safeguarding Referrals Team implements it. A failure to comply with the safeguarding policy and procedures will be investigated and may result in dismissal or exclusion from The Open University.

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## 7. Non-compliance

- 7.1 Breaches of codes of conduct may lead to disciplinary action according to the following policies or codes:

Students: [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#)

Staff: Disciplinary procedures for staff (via the internal [People Services website](#)).

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# Glossary of terms/Definitions

## Child

A child is a person who is under the age of 18 (or under 16 in Scotland). The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in Further/Higher education does not change their status for the purpose of this Policy.

## Safeguarding Referrals Team

The Safeguarding Referrals Team comprises staff who have been trained to handle queries from all parts of The Open University and other external sources regarding safeguarding concerns (relating to students or staff) and refers them to external agencies as appropriate ([Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk](mailto:Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk)).

## Vulnerable Adult

A vulnerable adult is a person aged 18 or over (or aged 16 or over in Scotland) who is, or may be, in need of services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness, and who is, or may be, unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm, abuse or exploitation, including being drawn into terrorism.

## Definitions of abuse

These are not exhaustive and it is worth noting that all the forms of abuse listed below are rarely found in isolation.

### Abuse

A form of maltreatment. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child/vulnerable adult by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children/vulnerable adults may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others (e.g. via the internet).

### Physical abuse

A form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child.

### Emotional abuse

The persistent emotional maltreatment of a child/vulnerable adult such as to cause severe and adverse effects on the victim's emotional health.

### Sexual abuse

Involves forcing or enticing a child or vulnerable adult to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the victim is aware of what is happening.

### Neglect

The persistent failure to meet a child or vulnerable adult's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the victim's health or development.

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## **Domestic abuse**

An incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer.

## **Financial abuse**

The use or misuse of money by a perpetrator which limits or controls their victim's current or future actions and their freedom of choice.

## **Discriminatory abuse**

A misuse of power that denies opportunity to a group or individual, usually motivated by the victim's age, gender, sexuality, disability, religion, class culture, language, race or ethnic origin.

## **Modern Slavery**

Trafficking or modern slavery is defined by the [United Nations Palermo Protocol \(UN 2003\)](#) in three phases:

- recruitment or acquisition of a man, woman or child
- means, i.e. through the use of force, deception, or coercion
- purpose, i.e. for the purpose of exploitation or forced labour.

## **Further clarification**

If you have any queries around the content provided within this document with regard to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, please contact:

[Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk](mailto:Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk).

## **Alternative format**

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact the Student Support Team via [Contact us](#) (phone +44 (0)300 303 5303), or via [StudentHome](#) if you are a current Open University student.

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# Appendix A

## Reporting a safeguarding concern: Online or report form

If you have a concern about a child or young person under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult:

1. Fill in the [webform](#) and send an email detailing your concern and your contact details to [Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk](mailto:Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk)
2. If you cannot fill in the webform or send an email, please print out this form below, fill in the relevant sections and post to:

Deborah Peat  
Head of Strategy and Quality Development, Academic Services  
1st Floor, West Wing  
Frank Henshaw Building  
The Open University  
Hammerwood Gate  
Milton Keynes  
MK7 6BY

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## Reporting a safeguarding concern: Report form

Your name:	
Your position and staff number/student Personal Identifier (if appropriate):	
Contact details:  Email:  Phone number:	
Person's name (and Personal Identifier) connected with the concern	
How is this person known to The Open University?	
Date and time the disclosure/ concern arose:	
Context in which disclosure/concern was raised:	
<p>Please describe the context in which the disclosure/concern was raised. Record as accurately as you can with actual words used, and, if possible, any questions you asked at the time:</p> <p>Continue on a separate sheet if necessary.</p>	

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## Reporting a safeguarding concern: Report form continued

Outline any initial action you took:	
Staff: Name of Senior Manager you referred the matter to:  Student: Name of person/office you referred the matter to:	
Details of any advice received:	
Any other comments:	
Your signature:	
Print name:	
Date:	

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# Appendix B

## Privacy Notice – Safeguarding

### 1. Scope

- 1.1 This document sets out what we do with your personal data when safeguarding concerns are reported to us.
- 1.2 This document applies to you if you report a safeguarding concern, if a safeguarding concern is reported about you, or a safeguarding concern is reported where you are at risk.

### 2. Who we are

- 2.1 The Open University is the data controller in relation to the processing activities described below. This means that the Open University decides why and how your personal information is processed.
- 2.2 Where this policy refers to “we”, “our” or “us” below, unless it mentions otherwise, it’s referring to The Open University

### 3. What information do we collect about you, and how do we collect it?

- 3.1 If information is brought to the attention of a member of Open University staff about a potential safeguarding risk, that member of staff is obliged to notify the Safeguarding Referrals Team. This could include the name of the person identifying the issue, the names of the individuals potentially at risk, and the name of the person they are at risk from, as well as details of personal circumstances which relate to the safeguarding concern.
- 3.2 This information may include “special category” data, for example, about health or disability, sexual life or sexual orientation.

### 4. How do we use your personal information?

- 4.1 We use this information to assess whether there is a safeguarding risk, and if there is any action that we need to take to keep individuals safe. This is a statutory and legal obligation informed by legislation including [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018](#) and [The Care Act 2014](#) and equivalent legislation for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- 4.2 The condition for processing special category data for this purpose would be that it is in the substantial public interest, for the purposes of protecting an individual from harm (see [Safeguarding amendment to Data Protection Bill](#))
- 4.3 We also keep statistical information about the number of safeguarding concerns that have been raised, and how they were resolved. This is in our legitimate interest to plan our services.

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## **5. Who do we share your information with?**

- 5.1 We will share information with police forces, and government agencies, where we deem it necessary to protect an individual. This is a legal and moral obligation.
- 5.2 We use third party suppliers and service providers for the provision of, for example, specialist safeguarding advice.
- 5.3 When we use third party service providers, we only disclose to them any personal information that is necessary for them to provide their service. We have a contract in place that requires them to keep your information secure and not to use it other than in accordance with our specific instructions.
- 5.4 Disclosure to a third party request for safeguarding-related information may be necessary, where The Open University knows of any reason why, for example, a student or alumni may not be suitable to work with children under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults.

## **6. Do we transfer information outside the European Economic Area (EEA)?**

- 6.1 Generally, information you provide to us is stored on our secure servers, or on our cloud-based systems which are located within the EEA.
- 6.2 There are times when we may need to store information outside the EEA. If we transfer your information outside of the EEA, we will ensure that appropriate security measures are taken so that your privacy rights continue to be protected as outlined in this policy. This would either be imposing contractual obligations on the recipient of your personal information, or ensuring that the recipients are subscribed to 'international frameworks' that aim to ensure adequate protection. For example, we would ensure that a US based supplier has signed up to "Privacy Shield".

## **7. How long do we keep your personal information for?**

- 7.1 The Safeguarding Referrals Team keep safeguarding concerns for three years from the date of case closed, if we decide they are not necessary to act on, and for 25 years if we do act on them.

## **8. Your rights**

- 8.1 You have a number of rights in relation to your personal information, which apply in certain circumstances under the General Data Protection Regulations. To exercise any of these rights, please contact us using the details in Section 9, below.
- 8.2 You have the right:
- To access your personal information that we process
  - To rectify inaccuracies in the personal information that we hold about you

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In some circumstances, you also have the right:

- To have your details removed from systems that we use to process your personal data
- To restrict the processing of your personal data in certain ways
- To obtain a copy of your personal data in a structured electronic data file
- To object to certain processing of your personal data by us
- To request that we stop sending you direct marketing communications.

If you are concerned about the way we have processed your personal information, you can complain to the [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](#).

## 9. Contact us

9.1 If you have any queries about safeguarding at The Open University, please contact the Safeguarding Referrals Team at [Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk](mailto:Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk).

9.2 The Open University has a nominated Data Protection Officer. If you have any queries about this privacy notice or about the way we process your personal information, please use the contact details below.

- Email: [data-protection@open.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@open.ac.uk)
- Telephone: +44 (0)1908 653994
- By post:

The Data Protection Officer  
PO Box 497  
The Open University  
Walton Hall  
Milton Keynes  
MK7 6AT

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