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## IN AN EMERGENCY

**If you are concerned that a child, young person, or adult at risk of harm is in possible IMMEDIATE danger - including risk of suicide, please contact the Emergency Services by telephoning 999 or 112 from outside the UK.**

If the individual is under 18, you must also then **complete a [webform](#)** including details of the incident.

## Alternative Format

If you require this Safeguarding Policy in an alternative format please [Contact Us](#) (visit [www.open.ac.uk/contact](http://www.open.ac.uk/contact)), telephone us on +44 (0)300 303 5303, or get in touch with your Student Support Team via StudentHome if you are a current Open University student.

- If you are studying an apprenticeship please contact the Apprentice Enrolment and Support Team (AEST) by email on [apprentice-support@open.ac.uk](mailto:apprentice-support@open.ac.uk), or telephone (+44 (0) 300 303 4121).
- Os ydych yn byw yng Nghymru, gallwch siarad gyda chynghorydd cymorth i fyfyrwyr yn Gymraeg trwy alw 029 2047 117. | If you live in Wales, you can speak to a student support adviser in Welsh on 029 2047 1170.
- Graduate School students can contact the Graduate School Office via email: [graduate-school@open.ac.uk](mailto:graduate-school@open.ac.uk).

## 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. Safeguarding is our responsibility to ensure that our staff, students, and other individuals connected to our activities do no harm to children and adults at risk. It is also our responsibility to manage any concerns raised and report them on to the appropriate authorities. For examples of the many forms that abusive behaviour can take, please visit our Help Centre webpage on [Safeguarding and complex welfare concerns](#).

In the UK, an "adult at risk" is defined as someone aged 18 or older who has care and support needs and is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect, and is unable to protect themselves from that abuse or neglect. For full details, see the definition in the [Definitions Section](#).

The Director, Academic Services, is the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) for The Open University. They have overall responsibility for the safety of students who are under the age of 18 and adults at risk of harm in accordance with relevant [UK legislation](#), and they are accountable for The Open University's practice.

The Safeguarding Steering Group ensure The Open University fulfils its statutory responsibilities for the safeguarding of children and for adults at risk, who are directly or indirectly involved with activities associated with the University.

Definitions of terms used in this policy can be found at the end of this document.

## **Scope**

### **What this policy covers**

This policy applies to:

- All students and learners studying at The Open University. This includes Graduate School students, and any students who are studying, taking a study break, and are under the age of 18.
- All children or adults at risk of harm who have a connection to Open University activities either directly or indirectly.
- Students participating in placements should also follow local safeguarding policies and procedures in those settings, in addition to this policy.
- External organisations/individuals engaged with official Open University activities such as contractors, who have a shared role in safeguarding individuals

## What this policy does not cover

- Students experiencing mental health difficulties who may pose a risk to themselves or others, but are not adults at risk of harm or under 18 years old and do not pose a safeguarding risk. You should contact the Emergency Services where there is a possibility of IMMEDIATE danger (by telephoning 999 or 112 from outside the UK). Please see the [Mental Health Policy](#) for further information. Students in this position can also access support via: [Your Student Support Team](#), [StudentHome](#), or the [Help Centre](#).
- Students who are 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.

## Support and Information

### Reporting a concern

- **If you are concerned that a child or adult at risk of harm is in possible IMMEDIATE danger, please take action to ensure their safety by contacting the Emergency Services by telephoning 999 or 112 from outside the UK.**
- For all other concerns regarding the safety or welfare of a child or adult at risk of harm, follow the Procedure in [Section 2](#) of this document.

### Help Centre Articles

- [Safeguarding and complex welfare concerns](#)
- [Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults \(or protected adults, or adults at risk\)](#)
- [Domestic abuse support](#)

## Reporting Bullying and Harassment

**Please note: any concern regarding the safety or welfare of a child or an adult at risk of harm should be reported to The Open University following the procedure in [Section 2](#) of this policy.**

The Open University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment where everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across The Open University will not be tolerated. We encourage staff, students, learners and visitors to report incidents of assault, bullying harassment, hate crime or sexual harassment through [Report + Support](#). This platform also provides information about what you can do if you or someone you know experiences such incidents, and where you can find support.

## Policy

1. Policy Principles: Our commitment to safeguarding
  - 1.1 The Open University has a statutory duty to protect children and adults at risk. A duty of care is a legal and ethical obligation to ensure the safety and well-being of others by taking reasonable steps to avoid causing them harm.
  - 1.2 The Open University also 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](#).
  - 1.3 In order to meet our Statutory Duty regarding safeguarding, we commit to the following principles. We will:
    - Take a university-wide strategic approach to safeguarding. The Safeguarding Steering Group maintains the oversight and governance of the Safeguarding Policy
    - Create and maintain a culture of safeguarding, providing a safe environment for everyone.
    - Promote a culture of listening and prioritising safety and wellbeing.

- Ensure all employees, students, contractors understand their roles and responsibilities in respect of safeguarding.
- Provide compliance training to all staff.
- Work in partnership with appropriate individuals, Student Support Services, Open SU, and agencies to promote safeguarding across The Open University including Local Authorities, the Police, and Health services.
- Provide good quality information, advice, and guidance on safeguarding to anyone requiring it.
- Ensure safer recruitment checks are completed for all Open University staff so that members of staff whose role involves specific activity with children and/or adults at risk of harm have no known history of harmful behaviour and are suitable for the position in line with policy and legislation requirements.
- Ensure that appropriate staff receive enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance (in England and Wales), a Disclosure Scotland check (in Scotland) or an Access NI check (in Northern Ireland).
- Acknowledge that it is not The Open University's responsibility to make judgements about any safeguarding concerns reported, but to ensure they are processed and referred on as appropriate.

## 2. How to report a concern regarding the safety or welfare of a child or an adult at risk of harm

### 2.1 **If you are concerned that a child, or adult at risk of harm is in possible IMMEDIATE danger, please take action to ensure their safety by contacting the Emergency Services by telephoning 999 or 112 from outside the UK.**

- 2.2 During your time as a student, you may learn about something that causes you concern about the safety of a child or adult at risk. This could be something that has happened recently or in the past. If you receive such information, please inform us by following the below steps (see Clause 2.6).
- 2.3 You may also receive information about someone in a position of authority which concerns you. If this relates to an Open University staff member, please see [“Concerns involving a member of Open University staff”](#) for information on what to do.
- 2.4 Our [Safeguarding and complex welfare concerns](#) webpage provides detail on how to manage this information and talk with an individual about your concern. Importantly when talking to the individual you must not promise confidentiality in case you need to pass their information on.
- 2.5 The Welfare Team are available to discuss initial concerns and provide advice if you are unsure of the next steps to take: please [Contact Us](#) for details. Asking for their advice does not always mean that a formal safeguarding referral will be required.
- 2.6 If you are concerned about the risk to a child or adult at risk of harm and do not think they are in immediate danger; or if a person discloses a safeguarding concern to you, please complete the [webform](#) with as much detail as possible regarding your concern, as soon as you can. If you are not sure about the information to share with us, please contact the [Welfare Team](#) who can help you complete the referral form.
- 2.7 If you prefer to email us, please email our [Welfare Team](#) at [Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk](mailto:Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk), with as much detail as possible (including your contact details).
- 2.8 The Welfare Team records all queries received via the [Welfare Team mailbox](#), and verifies the details with the student (where appropriate) in order to offer relevant support or to refer our concerns to external agencies, such as emergency services or relevant social services (see [Section 3](#) for further details). You may be asked to provide further information about your concern.



- 2.9 All information and data received will be stored in accordance with our [Student Privacy Notice](#) and [Safeguarding Privacy Notice](#) (see [Section 3](#) for further details).
- 2.10 A Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and our Welfare Team will assess all referrals received into the [Safeguarding Referrals mailbox](#) and determine what steps to take. As a result, we may contact the student in question to provide appropriate support and advocacy. Where deemed necessary, we may also make referrals to external agencies to help protect the student/child or adult at risk of harm and minimise safeguarding concerns (see [Section 5](#) for details).

**How to report a concern outside of standard business hours or during the holidays:**

- 2.11 **Where there is a possibility of immediate danger, contact the Emergency Services on: 999 or 112 from outside the UK.**
- 2.12 If you are concerned about the risk to a child/ adult at risk of harm outside of our standard business hours (8.30am-5pm Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays) and you require expert advice, please contact the local Children's Social Care or Adult Social Services. You will be able to find their details through an Internet search of your local children or adults' service.
- 2.13 Alternatively you can contact The [NSPCC Helpline](#) if you have concerns for an under 18-year-old on: 0808 800 5000 (Available: Monday to Friday between 8am–10pm; or 9am–6pm at the weekends).
- 2.14 If you refer your concern to an external organisation outside of our standard business hours, please also email our [Welfare team](#) with any information that you have reported.

## Concerns involving a member of Open University staff

- 2.15 We take any concerns around abuse involving a member of Open University staff or a person of authority seriously. Anyone (including students, Graduate School Students, staff members or external organisations) can report such allegations or concerns about a member of our staff to the University's Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) using the email address: [DSL@open.ac.uk](mailto:DSL@open.ac.uk). Allegations or concerns about a member of Open University staff can also be reported via [Report + Support](#). We handle allegations against staff under the Open University's relevant policies and information will be shared with external agencies if required, such as the Police, DBS/Barring services, Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO; or local equivalent), or the Social Services.

### 3. Storing and processing your information

- 3.1 The Welfare Team keeps electronic records of all referrals and concerns securely and confidentially on a restricted server with restricted access, in accordance with data protection guidelines. Data held is accessed on a need-to-know basis according to our [Student Privacy Notice](#) and [Safeguarding Privacy Notice](#).
- 3.2 We have a duty of care to ensure the wellbeing of our community, as set out in statutory guidance including the [Care Act \(2014\)](#) and [The Children Act \(2004\)](#), [Keeping children safe in education \(2025\)](#) and [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2023\)](#). A full list of legislation and guidance for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is set out in the '[Related Policies and Legislation](#)' section of this policy.
- 3.3 If we believe an at-risk adult or a child under the age of 18 is at risk of significant harm, we have a duty to share this information with the relevant agencies in order to put the necessary safeguarding in place to prevent harm or further harm.

- 3.4 Wherever possible or appropriate, we aim to seek the consent of the student (connected to the child or an adult at risk), before sharing their information with an external agency such as a social services department. Information that might be shared would include the connected student's name, contact details and the nature of our concern. If you (or the student) are reporting concerns based on another student, we can request agencies to maintain your privacy where appropriate (however it is important to note that this cannot be guaranteed).
- 3.5 We will only disclose the student's information to third parties (as listed above) with the absence of their consent in exceptional circumstances (in line with our duty of care – see [Section 5](#)). Further details about how your information may be disclosed can be found in our [Student Privacy Notice](#) and [Safeguarding Privacy Notice](#). Information may be shared with third parties without your consent where this is in the public interest, i.e. where there is a risk of serious harm to either an identified individual(s), a group of people or a community. Examples of circumstances which may meet the definition of public interest include, but are not limited to:
- Where there is believed to be a risk of harm to a child (a person under the age of 18) or an adult at risk;
  - Where a serious crime has occurred or is planned;
  - Risk of suicide or where the suicide plan may involve a public location or public transport;
  - Risk of psychological harm or trauma in relation to others witnessing self-harm or suicide;
  - Where the student is on a professional practice course and their ability to practise safely and effectively may be compromised (as detailed in our [Fitness to Practise procedure](#)).
- 3.6 This approach to information sharing aligns with Universities UK (UUK), Information Commissioners Office (ICO) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) guidance. The guidance permits disclosures if it is necessary and proportionate to reduce the risk of serious harm.

4. Tutorial recordings and considerations for students under the age of 18
- 4.1 In line with our [Policy for the recording of online tutorials](#), staff at The Open University, or students with disabilities or additional needs may wish to record a tutorial. Recordings are intended to support learning by allowing students to revisit sessions or catch up on missed content.
- 4.2 We treat the safeguarding of students under the age of 18 as our priority, and we seek to protect their rights, privacy and wellbeing during all academic activities, including recorded tutorials.
- 4.3 In order to implement our safeguarding duty we ask all students who are under the age of 18 to follow the below principles:
- **Signing up in advance:** Students are directed to sign up to tutorials in advance so that tutors and facilitators have visibility of their attendance.
  - **Awareness:** Students under the age of 18, and their parents or guardians (where appropriate), will be informed about the recording practices and the purpose of these recordings.
  - **Right to Opt-Out:** If a student under 18 is uncomfortable with being recorded by the Open University, they have the right to opt out of the tutorial. In such cases, we will consider alternative arrangements to ensure students are not disadvantaged by requesting that they do not attend a recorded tutorial.
  - **Student recordings:** Students are only permitted to record tutorials in line with the [Policy for the recording of online tutorials](#). Any misuse of recordings will be treated as a breach of conduct in line with our [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#), and this Safeguarding Policy.

4.4 In addition to Clause 4.3 above, The Open University will protect students under the age of 18 by following the below principles:

- **Secure Storage and Access:** All recordings that have been made by The Open University will be stored securely and accessed only by authorised individuals. Recordings must not be shared externally or used for any purpose other than academic support.
- **Awareness of attendance:** If a student has registered in advance of the tutorial, tutors and facilitators will be aware of those students who are under the age of 18, and will ensure safeguarding principles are upheld during recorded sessions. Any concerns from staff during the tutorial will be raised immediately with the Student Welfare Team.
- **Recording protocols:** All students will be reminded of the protocols for recording a tutorial at the start of each session. Students will also be advised about whether a tutorial is being recorded by The Open University, and students will be provided with clear options for opting out. Students who are under the age of 18 will not be penalised for choosing to opt out of attending a recorded tutorial.

## 5. Situations where we do not require consent to share information

5.1 There are certain situations that align with our duty of care to protect individuals from harm where we are permitted to break the requirement to maintain confidentiality. In such cases, we do not need to receive your consent to share information in order to protect an individual's welfare. We do not require your consent to share your information in the following situations:

- a. **Child Protection Concerns:** If we believe a child is at risk of significant harm,
- b. **Public Interest:** When the need to safeguard an individual or others outweighs the need for confidentiality.
- c. **Serious Crime:** To prevent, detect, or prosecute a serious crime, including where a crime has already occurred.

- d. **Court Orders:** When required to do so by a legal order.
- e. **Legal Obligations:** To comply with legislation that mandates the sharing of information, even without consent.
- f. **Adults at Risk and/ or Protected Adults:** If an adult is at risk of serious harm, abuse, or neglect, and consent cannot be obtained or is overridden due to risk.
- g. **Coercion or Lack of Capacity:** If an individual is being coerced, manipulated, or lacks the capacity to make an informed decision, we will act to ensure their safety.

5.2 If a decision is taken without your consent in line with Clause 5.1 above, we will:

- a. **Share only the minimum information necessary** to protect the individual;
- b. **Assess the capacity** of the student connected to the child or adult at risk to determine whether they understand the implications of their decision and can give informed consent;
- c. **Communicate with you** where safe and appropriate, to explain why the information is being shared;
- d. **Prioritise empowerment**, supporting your autonomy and involving you in decisions wherever possible;
- e. **Seek professional guidance** from Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) when unsure, and they will make the final decision on whether to break confidentiality and refer to the Local Authority;
- f. **Always notify the Local Authority** if we have not gained your consent for the referral;
- g. **Document** our rationale for breaking consent, the actions taken, and any advice sought;

- h. **Notify you (if appropriate)** that we have made a referral without your consent, unless we believe that telling you could cause further harm to you and/or others. In such cases, the Designated Safeguarding Lead may take the decision not to tell you.

## 6. Non-compliance with this policy

6.1 Safeguarding is a legal obligation that underpins all of our activities. As such, this policy is mandatory and cannot be waived or adjusted under any circumstances. Any breach of the Safeguarding Policy or its procedures will be formally investigated and may lead to dismissal or exclusion from The Open University.

6.2 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](#)).

## Definitions

### Adult at risk of harm

A person aged 18 or over in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (or over 16 in Scotland), who is, or may be, in need of services by reason of mental health conditions or 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.

### Consent

This means giving permission for something to happen or agreeing to do something and being comfortable with that decision. Consent can be withdrawn at any time.

### Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

A Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is a senior member of staff responsible for leading and coordinating safeguarding and student protection across the institution. In a university context, the DSL ensures that safeguarding policies are effectively implemented, concerns are appropriately managed, and staff are trained to identify and respond to risks affecting students.

### Harassment

Any unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of an individual, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

### Prevent Duty

The Prevent Duty is a safeguarding responsibility requiring universities to identify and support students who may be vulnerable to radicalisation. It involves promoting safe environments, encouraging open dialogue, and ensuring staff are trained to recognise signs of extremism. The duty is part of a broader safeguarding approach, aiming to protect students from harm while upholding academic freedom and freedom of expression.



## Safeguarding Duty

Safeguarding duty refers to the legal and moral responsibility of universities to protect students (particularly those who may be vulnerable) from harm, abuse, neglect, exploitation, or radicalisation. This includes creating safe environments, responding to concerns appropriately, and working in partnership with external agencies to ensure the wellbeing and safety of all students.

## Safeguarding Steering Group

The Safeguarding Steering Group is a cross-functional team within The Open University that provides strategic oversight, coordination, and governance of safeguarding practices, bringing together key stakeholders to review safeguarding policies, monitor risks, ensure compliance with statutory duties (e.g. Prevent Duty, Office for Students requirements), and promote a safe and supportive environment for students and staff.

## The Student Welfare Team

The Student Welfare Team is responsible for supporting students' wellbeing. The team provides guidance on a range of issues including mental health, safeguarding and wellbeing which could be affecting your studies. They work collaboratively with academic departments, external services, and safeguarding leads to ensure students receive timely and appropriate support.

## Under 18

A child or young person is classed as under 18 until the eve of their 18th birthday.

## Related Policies and Legislation

Other documentation relevant to safeguarding at The Open University includes:

- [Admission of applicants under the age of 18](#)
- [Advocacy policy](#)
- [Bullying, harassment & sexual misconduct: it's never OK \(webpage\)](#)
- [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#)
- [Dignity and respect](#)
- [Domestic Abuse/Gender Based Violence Policy](#)
- [Fitness to Practise Procedure](#)
- [Fitness to Study Policy](#)
- [Open University Prevent Principles](#)
- [Policy for the recording of online tutorials](#)
- [Social Media Policy](#)
- [Student Computing Policy](#)
- [Student Privacy Notice](#) and [Safeguarding Privacy Notice](#)
- [Whistleblowing Policy](#)

This policy is informed by legislation and guidance including:

- [Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act \(2019\)](#)
- [Keeping children safe in education \(2025\)](#)
- [Modern Slavery Act \(2015\)](#)
- [Special educational needs and disability \(SEND\) code of practice: 0-25 years – Statutory guidance 2014](#)
- [Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act \(2006\)](#)
- [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- [Children Act \(2004\)](#)

**England:**

- [Working together to safeguard children \(2023\): statutory guidance](#)
- [Care Act \(2014\)](#)
- [Domestic Abuse Act \(2021\)](#)

**Northern Ireland:**

- [Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland](#)
- [Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act \(Northern Ireland\) \(2021\)](#)

**Scotland:**

- [Protection of Vulnerable Groups \(Scotland\) Act \(2007\)](#)
- [Equally Safe 2018: Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women](#)
- [Domestic Abuse \(Scotland\) Act \(2018\)](#)

**Wales:**

- [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act \(2014\)](#)
- [Keeping learners safe: the role of local authorities, governing bodies and proprietors of independent schools under the Education Act 2002](#)
- [Wales Safeguarding Procedures \(All\)](#)
- [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act \(2015\)](#)
- [Working together to safeguard people: code of safeguarding practice](#)
- [Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(Wales\) Act \(2015\)](#)
- [Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: strategy 2022 to 2026](#)

## Give Us Your Feedback

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please share this with us, by emailing [SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk](mailto:SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk).

## Our Student Charter Values

[The Student Charter](#) was developed jointly by The Open University and Open SU. It is a declaration of our shared values and the commitments we make to each other. This document has been developed with the Student Charter values as its foundation.

## Our commitment to Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Our commitment to equality and inclusion is embedded in all that we do and reflects our mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. We celebrate diversity and the strengths that it brings, whilst challenging under-representation and differences in outcomes within our institution. We promote and manage equality and diversity to meet both our strategic goals and our statutory equality duties. We achieve this in many ways, including the development of inclusive policy.

## Welsh language standards

### [Safonau'r Gymraeg \(Welsh Language Standards\)](#)

The Open University is one of several universities named in the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. This means that any students in Wales can expect to receive certain services from the OU in Welsh. These are outlined in what's called the [OU's Welsh language standards](#).

This means that you can speak to our student recruitment and support team in Welsh or contact the university in Welsh. You can find out more about your rights as a Welsh language user on the [OU in Wales website](#).

## About this Document

This policy document replaces the previous policy “Safeguarding Policy – Protecting children and vulnerable adults.” The policy was rewritten and revised to reflect current legislation and guidance on reporting concerns about the safety or welfare of a child or an adult at risk of harm at The Open University. These changes have been made to improve clarity and reflect the current University processes regarding safeguarding.

### Policies Superseded by this Document

This policy is a new document that replaces the previous policy “Safeguarding Policy – Protecting children and vulnerable adults” which was effective from August 2024.

### Document Information

**Version number:** 1.0

**Approved by:** Student Experience Committee, October 2025

**Effective from:** November 2025

**Date for review:** November 2028

### How to contact us about this policy

If you have any queries about this policy, please [Contact Us](#). To check the contact details for the Open University, please see [OU Offices](#).

If you are studying an apprenticeship, please contact the Apprentice Enrolment and Support Team (AEST) by email on [apprentice-support@open.ac.uk](mailto:apprentice-support@open.ac.uk), or telephone (+44 (0) 300 303 4121).

Welsh-speaking Students and Learners may speak with a student support adviser in Welsh on +44 (0) 29 2047 1170. You can convey your concerns in the medium of Welsh and will be treated no less favourably than if you conveyed them in the medium of English.

Graduate School students can contact the Graduate School Office via email [graduate-school@open.ac.uk](mailto:graduate-school@open.ac.uk).

## Charity Statement

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England and 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.