Safeguarding Policy

1. General policy statement

1.1 Statement of Commitment

The University of Essex Online provides undergraduate and postgraduate degrees to students across the globe, all programmes are delivered entirely online to a geographically diverse student population. In line with current legislation and guidance in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (see Appendix A) we recognise that we have a duty of care in creating a safe online environment for all students to undertake their studies, and for staff to undertake their teaching and support duties.

1.2 Scope and Principles

1.   The safety of vulnerable/protected groups (for definitions see appendix B) is accorded utmost priority and is the shared responsibility of all staff at the University of Essex Online.

2.   Vulnerable/protected groups should be free to work, learn and develop their potential without fear of violence, abuse or exploitation. Within the University of Essex Online environment, irrespective of their age, gender, disability, racial origin, religion, belief and sexual orientation, they will be valued and their rights to protection and safety fully respected.

     All agencies working with children and vulnerable adults have a duty to work together to protect them from harm and abuse and minimise risk wherever reasonably possible. This policy sets out the approach taken by University of Essex Online to safeguard and actively promote the welfare of all students, staff and visitors. All staff and students are expected to familiarise themselves with the provisions of this policy and ensure adherence to the intention of the policy and legal obligations.

3.   The University of Essex Online places the welfare of its students and staff as a principal consideration. This Policy seeks to ensure that:

- young people, 'adults at risk' and staff are protected from harm and abuse

- all staff know what to do if they are worried or have concerns

- everyone is aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding

- students and staff feel protected and supported

4.   This policy applies to everyone working or studying with the University of Essex Online. It confers responsibilities on staff, students, associate tutors, consultants and those working under self-employed arrangements.

2. Aims

1.   The University of Essex Online believes that all students and staff have the right to be respected and protected from all forms of harm, abuse or exploitation whether intentional or unintentional, irrespective of their age, gender, disability, racial origin, religion, belief and sexual orientation. The University of Essex Online recognises its contribution and moral duties towards safeguarding all students, especially those who are vulnerable by actively promoting a culture of value and respect for all within a supportive online learning environment.

3. Reducing risk

The University of Essex Online will strive to

- provide and maintain a safe and supportive online learning environment for our students

- provide and maintain a safe and supportive online environment for staff and visitors

- provide clear guidelines and procedures for all staff so that they can respond appropriately to safeguarding and Prevent Duty concerns

- provide specific safeguarding training, guidance and support to all our staff

- identify vulnerable adults who are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm

- communicate with all students, particularly vulnerable adults, the standards of behaviour and conduct they can expect from our staff and what to do if they experience or suspect abuse

- ensure all students are aware of the University of Essex Online commitment to the safety and welfare of vulnerable/protected groups and relevant codes of conduct and understand that any legitimate suspicions or concerns will be reported to the appropriate agencies. Breaches of codes of conducts may lead to disciplinary action as set out in the Student Code of Conduct Policy

- recognise that students with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities may present additional barriers when identifying potential abuse and neglect in this group

- act promptly and diligently on any safeguarding concern

- ensure that all aspects of data protection, disclosure legislation and data security are adhered to and compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018, and that our internal paper and electronic data storage systems protect individuals and provide appropriate confidentiality.

1. All suspicions and allegations of abuse or inappropriate behaviour will be taken seriously by the University of Essex Online. While it is not possible to ensure that students will never come to any harm, the adoption of this policy, associated guidelines and the Code of Conduct aims to facilitate the management of risk associated with the duty to protect staff and students.

2. This Policy will be reviewed and updated as required to monitor its effectiveness and to address any changes in legislation.

4. Designated Safeguarding Officer for the University of Essex Online (Kaplan Open Learning*)

The Designated Safeguarding Officer(s) for Kaplan Open Learning are:

- Director of Student Services

- Head of Student Services

5. Responsibilities

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of students is everyone's responsibility. All staff have a responsibility to provide a supportive online environment in which all students can learn.

5.1 Permanent Staff and Associate Tutors

Staff have a responsibility to:

- create and support an ethos that upholds University of Essex Online's mission, vision and values and to create an environment of respect, equality and diversity, and inclusion, and the aspirations of the Student Charter.

- demonstrate a personal and professional commitment to the University of Essex Online safeguarding policy and procedures and wider principles of safeguarding

- understand the power and influence of their positions, particularly with more vulnerable students, and not abuse it

- undertake all relevant safeguarding and Prevent training

- report all instances, allegations and suspicions related to safeguarding to a Designated Safeguarding Officer who will determine any action to be taken

- fully co-operate with any investigations and to demonstrate confidentiality.

5.2 University of Essex Online Students

University of Essex Online Students have a responsibility to:

- promote a supportive and positive online learning environment by challenging and reporting behaviour that appears to be causing distress to others

- support an open, safe and constructive learning environment in which diversity is valued

- respect other people's rights to safety

- not hurt or abuse or threaten to hurt or abuse others online

- adhere to the Student Charter, Student Code of Conduct Policy, the Use of the Virtual Learning Environment and Social Media Policy and the Prevent Policy.

5.3 University of Essex Online Governance

Responsibility for monitoring, effective implementation and operation of the Policy is undertaken by the Senior Management Team (SMT), in conjunction with the safeguarding officers..

6. Student Welfare and Support

1.   The University of Essex Online provides personal support to all students in the form of a dedicated Student Support Team.

2.   The Student Support Team will:

- welcome students to their course and provide information about the learning platform and signpost students to available resources and additional external support

- contact students at regular intervals to establish a close rapport and ensure that they are comfortable with all aspects of the programme

- provide the first point of contact for students to discuss any concerns relating to their course or difficulties they may be facing that may impact on their ability to study.

7. Dealing with disclosures of abuse and procedure for reporting safeguarding concerns

1.   It is not the place of University of Essex Online staff or students to make a judgement about whether abuse has occurred. This is the remit of the statutory agencies and/or the police. However, all have a responsibility for reporting suspicions or concerns of abuse and for ensuring that the vulnerable/protected adult is taken seriously.

2. All staff have a responsibility to respond if a safeguarding disclosure, allegation and/or cause for concern has been brought to their attention. In the first instance, the matter should be raised with a Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) who will ensure that the appropriate procedure is followed.

3. Where an allegation, disclosure or cause for concern is raised, the DSO will initiate the University of Essex Online's safeguarding process as detailed in appendix C. In collaboration with another DSO or appropriate senior member of University of Essex Online staff an assessment will be made of whether a person is deemed an immediate risk to themselves or to any members of the University of Essex Online community. If this assessment identifies an immediate risk the relevant authorities will be notified; this may include emergency services in countries outside of the UK.

4. Where the risk is not deemed immediate the DSO may consult with the Dean/Deputy Dean at the University of Essex to determine appropriate actions.

5. In implementing this policy and in appropriate circumstances, the University of Essex Online will engage proactively with statutory local authority boards and organisations in the UK and when necessary and appropriate to do so, follow their published guidelines, policies and procedures.

6. The University of Essex Online is under a statutory duty to have regard to the need to prevent people being radicalised or drawn into terrorism. If there is a reason to believe that a student to whom this policy applies may be at risk of being drawn into terrorism, any action taken must be done in consideration of the Prevent Policy and in collaboration with the Prevent Lead.

8. Confidentiality and Record Keeping

1. Where a member of the University of Essex Online community wishes to raise a concern, they may do so in confidence, by contacting the Student Support team or a DSO. Whilst the University of Essex Online seeks to promote an environment in which concerns can be raised confidentially, where it is believed that a person poses a risk to themselves or others, it is the responsibility of the person receiving the information to escalate the information to a DSO

and, at the time of the concern being raised, should always explain clearly that they have a duty to report the concern and to whom, noting that this may include reporting the concern to external agencies if required.

2.   The processing of sensitive personal data will be in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), and where relevant, in line with any information sharing agreements and/or professional codes of conduct. Records relating to students or staff will be stored confidentially.

9. Whistleblowing

The University of Essex Online and Kaplan Open Learning are committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. Cases where an individual discovers information which they believe shows malpractice/wrongdoing within the organisation are handled in accordance with the GHC Whistleblowing Policy which has been designed to enable employees to disclose information without fear of reprisal, and for the disclosures to be made independently of line management where appropriate.

Responsible Manager	Title	Date Approved	Related Policies
Carol Dadd	Director of Quality and Compliance	August 2025	**Use of the VLE and Social Media** **Student Code of Conduct** **Prevent Policy**

Appendix A – Relevant Legislation

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, England and Wales

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007

The Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007

The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015.

Appendix B – Some Definitions of vulnerable adults

The average age of a University of Essex Online student is 34, and we do not enrol students who are under 18 years of age, therefore definitions of vulnerable adults are particularly relevant here:

6.1 England and Wales

A person is a vulnerable adult if, having attained the age of 18 they:

- Are in residential accommodation

- Are in sheltered housing

- Receives any form of health care

- Is detained in lawful custody (in a prison, remand centre, young offender institution, secure training centre or attendance centre, or under the powers of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999)

- Is under the supervision of the probation services

- By virtue of an order of court, is under supervision per Criminal Justice Act 2003 sections regarding community sentences

- Receives a welfare service or a prescribed description

- Receives any service or participates in any activity provided specifically for persons who have particular needs because of their age, has any form of disability or has a prescribed physical or mental problem (Dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia are excluded disabilities)

- Is an expectant or nursing mother living in residential care

- Have payments made to them or to an accepted representative in pursuance of arrangements under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, and/or

- Require assistance in the conduct of their own affairs.

6.2 In Scotland

A protected adult is defined in Section 94 of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups Act (2007) as an individual aged 16 or over who is provided with (and thus receives) a type of care, support or welfare service. Protected adult is therefore a service-based definition and avoids labelling adults on the basis of their having a specific condition or disability.

There are four categories of services, receipt of any one of which makes an individual a protected adult:

- Registered care services

- Health services

- Community care services

- Welfare services

6.3 in Northern Ireland

The Regional Adult Protection Forum has adopted the Law Commission for England and Wales (1995) definition of a 'vulnerable adult' as:

'a person aged 18 years or over who is, or may be, in need of community care services or is resident in a continuing care facility by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness or who is, or may be, unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

Appendix C – Process for Escalating a Safeguarding Concern

A concern has been raised with a Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO)

Early assessment is necessary to establish whether this is a safeguarding concern or if the concern should be referred to other support services

The SRF can be accessed on the KOL Intranet

Yes, there is an immediate risk - contact the relevant emergency services (maybe outside of the UK)

Start information gathering and begin completion of Safeguarding Report Form (SRF).

Consider whether there is an immediate risk to the person or community.

The SRF **must be** completed within **1 working day** of receiving the initial concern and always updated with any additional actions

Establish whether we need to refer the concern to an external agency.

External referral **must be** completed within **2 working days** of receiving the initial concern and always update the SRF

Is a case conference required?

Refer to DSO guidance on the case conference process.

Yes – refer to DSO guidance on case conference process.

No – case closed. SRF updated

Consider if any process amendments should result from this case