

Studying at a distance

Some safety guidelines for students who are under 18 and their parent(s)/carer(s).

Please share these guidelines with your parent(s)/carer(s). The Open University is keen to ensure that it is a safe place for young students, and if you or they have any concern at any time, you should contact our Safeguarding Referrals Team via email safeguarding-referrals@open.ac.uk

You already know that The Open University is different from traditional universities, not just because it offers learning at a distance, but because the majority of our students are adults. You will be working alongside people from very diverse backgrounds and with an age range from under 18 to 80. This has always been a benefit and part of the unique experience of studying with us. Adult students benefit from working with you too!

Open University study involves engagement with a variety of online forums, some of which are moderated and some which are not*, as well as chat rooms, social networking sites and sharing apps, which allow you to engage in discussions on all kinds of topics with fellow students. These students come from all over the UK and overseas. It is important, therefore, that you take account of the following basic safety guidelines. Remember, other students will not necessarily be aware that you are under 18 and may still be at school.

The majority of our computer forums and chat rooms are moderated, and any inappropriate messages will be deleted. However, others are not moderated, and there is an increasing informal use of Facebook and other social network sites and sharing apps, over which the University has no authority. If you feel uncomfortable about any approach from another student or anybody involved with The Open University, we would want to know so we can address any concerns you may have. You should tell a teacher if you are still at school, or your Open University Student Support Team or tutor, and also speak to your parents/carers/guardians immediately. You can also have a look at the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), (www.ceop.police.uk/reportabuse). This is an independent organisation, which also provides advice, guidance and reassurance to children, young people and parents.

The Open University is keen to ensure your full participation in the opportunities available and advises that, to do so safely, you should be mindful about your safety when accessing any social media.

We would advise you:

- Not to give out personal details such as your age, address, telephone or mobile number, msn or other addresses, photo, school name and location, workplace name and location, favourite meeting places etc to anyone in a computer forum, chat room or social network sites or to other students in your tutor group.

** Moderators have responsibility for regularly overseeing the content of online forums and for deleting inappropriate contributions.*

- Not to arrange to meet another student with whom you have only had online contact via computer forums, chat rooms or social network sites and sharing apps.
- To discuss with your parents/carers/guardians and seek their agreement if you wish to meet socially with a student from your tutor group. We would not encourage you to do this, but if it is decided a meeting will take place, we advise you to ensure it is in a public place and a responsible adult such as a parent or relative is present.

Note to parents/ carers/guardians

The Open University is committed to ensuring that it provides a safe environment for its small but increasing number of students who are under the age of 18, and we encourage you to discuss the above guidelines together.

In addition to the points raised above, we would like to raise three further specific issues with you:

- Our modules are written with adult students in mind, and, while we take the question of suitability for our under 18s very seriously, we do not wish to prevent them from studying modules, which are academically appropriate and of interest to them. The Open University's distance learning teaching approach increasingly involves engagement in online forums. Occasionally, material relating to the module may be posted by other students to members of their tutorial group which, although academically relevant to the module of study, contain adult themes.

Most forums are carefully monitored according to the University's Computing Code of Conduct: <http://www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents/computing-policy-students> and Code of Practice for Student Discipline: <http://www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents/code-practice-student-discipline> by which all our students are bound. We wish you to be aware of this small risk and to confirm your agreement to your child/the young person in your care studying such courses by signing that you have read and understood these guidelines on his/her Registration Agreement.

- The Open University is a leader in institutional research to further knowledge and understanding of distance learning. This research may involve students being invited to contribute their experience of studying with us, either by telephone, questionnaire or by focus group. The experience of our students under 18 is of interest to us and we would like to include them from time to time in our surveys. By signing this form you are confirming your permission for your child/the young person in your care to be contacted with a view to being invited to participate in such research surveys. If you would prefer to your child/the young person in your care not to be invited to participate in research, please update preferences on the StudentHome page 'Your contact preferences'. Open University policy ensures that students are not overburdened by requests for participation.
- The Open University is increasingly offering real-time tutorials at a distance via online classroom systems. There is a possibility for these tutorials to be recorded, either for the benefit of students who could not participate at the time, or for subsequent reference. Consent of participating students is required for such a recording, and tutors will make alternative arrangements, should any student not wish his or her contribution to be recorded.