



Arab Open University
Safeguarding Policy

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| Policy Title: | Safeguarding Policy |
| Version Number | 1 |
| Executive Owner: | Vice President for Planning and Development |
| Approving Authority | University Council # 75, March 2022 |
| Policy Review: | Quality Assurance Accreditation , Academic and Institutional Standards Committee(QAAIS) |
| Policy Implementation: | AOU HQ and AOU Branches |
| Policy Monitoring and Compliance: | Quality Assurance and Accreditation Units at AOU Branches Students Affairs Offices Human Resources Department |
| Next Review Date | 2024 |

Note: A policy may be reviewed before the designated review date should there be a need to.

Safeguarding Policy

The Arab Open University will make every effort to create and maintain a safe and healthy organizational culture for all its students and staff. In line with its policy for equal opportunity and respect for diversity, AOU will promote safeguarding values through its commitment to equality, diversity and respect for the dignity of others, especially those protected groups as highlighted in the equal opportunity and respect for diversity policy.

The University recognizes its responsibility to provide a safe learning environment and to protect all members of its community from harassment, harm and abuse.

Statement:

As a partner of OU-UK, AOU will adhere to the validating partner requirement as per the Office for Students (OFS), to be interpreted and applied within the legal framework of each AOU country and any other branch local accreditation requirements. The AOU thus commits itself to safe guard and protect its community members from harassment, harm and abuse.

Scope:

The policy applies to all members of the university community including students, staff and others who work with the university on part-time bases or

through a contractual agreement with a third party. The policy applies both during and outside normal work hours.

Relevant Definitions:

Safeguarding: "measures to prevent report and respond to harm or abuse and to protect the health, well-being, rights and the dignity of individuals".ⁱ¹

Child: "a child is an individual who is under the age of 18".²ⁱⁱa child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.

Vulnerable Groups: "refer to individuals/ students under the age of 18 years old or adults of the age of 18 and above who are unable to protect themselves from harm, abuse, harassment or exploitation. It also includes those who are deemed at risk due to their gender, disability, physical or mental health, ethnicity, religious beliefs or social or economic background"³.

Harassment:" includes unwanted behavior or conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment"⁴.

Abuse:" A form of maltreatment and can take many forms including physical, emotional, verbal and discriminatory abuse."⁵

Safeguarding Commitments

- The University Senior management across its campuses are expected to promote safeguarding values by highlighting the university's commitment to equality, diversity and respect for the dignity of others.

- At all times staff and students are expected to conform to AOU code of Professional Conduct and students' code of conduct and disciplinary procedures.
- The university will adopt a safer recruitment policy to ensure that all employees are of good standing and uphold high ethical values. It will also employ due diligence processes in the recruitment and admission of students to create an environment where it is safe from harassment, abuse and unlawful acts.
- AOU will develop procedures to ensure the full implementation of the safeguarding policy and to respond to any breaches of the policy.
- AOU will ensure that a safeguarding team is designated in each campus and study centre.
- It will make sure that the safe guarding policy, process is widely disseminated, and that students and staff are well aware of the policy and expected behaviour.
- The university will collaborate on safeguarding with the local organisations and governments to advance and to contribute to the societal efforts to prevent respond to harassment, harm and abuse.

Implementation:

- In each AOU campus, a safeguarding team will be formulated and trained to handle and respond to any safeguarding concerns.

- The university will provide the necessary resources and support for full implementation of the safeguarding policy and other relevant policies and codes of conduct.
- AOU will ensure that it has in place clear reporting mechanisms that are accessible to all those who wish to report including vulnerable groups.
- The University will provide assistance and support to complainants or vulnerable groups who are expressing safeguarding concerns or a need for support.
- The university will handle complaints and relevant report with great care and according to AOU confidentiality policy and data protection policy.
- The University will respond appropriately to protect complainants or those who reports issues of concern from any form of retaliation.
- Investigation and fact finding sessions will be conducted in a sensitive and timely manner.
- The university has the right to take any administrative, disciplinary or legal action or to refer the case to the relevant local authorities including law enforcement bodies.
- The university will have robust monitoring mechanism to ensure that the policy is implemented across all branches and HQ.
- The policy will be disseminated and discussed with all stakeholders through appropriate formal channels including students' guides, the university website and induction sessions.

Specific details for the effective implementation of the policy

The safeguarding team shall be carefully selected from experienced senior academic staff. (3- 4 academic members including at least female staff member).The safeguarding team may consult with the legal advisor, senior staff from human resources or students affairs office in the review and decision making process.

The safeguarding team will be appropriately trained. The AOU will coordinate with the OUVF to arrange for the staff training by the expert OU safeguarding team.

The safeguarding team will observe cultural norms and local values when implementing the safeguarding policy.

Safeguarding incidents and concerns are to be handled with utmost care, high sensitivity and with due regard to local regulatory frameworks.

The safeguarding team is expected to maintain confidentiality and disclose any conflict of interest.

All individuals involved have the rights to remain anonymous. However, Safeguarding Team have the duty to disclose the necessary information and details to the respective authority.

All incidents will be properly documented and the respective records are kept safely as per AOU approved procedures.

Compliance with the policy:

All Members of the AOU community are accountable for their actions and as members of the University community, are collectively accountable for upholding professional and Ethical standards of behavior and for compliance with this policy. Any conduct that departs from the stated policy and AOU Codes of Conduct is unacceptable and is subject to appropriate actions. False reporting or retaliation are considered a violation of the policy and AOU codes of conduct. Complainants, respondents, witnesses and other involved parties, knowingly or deliberately providing false or misleading information during the grievance and investigation process will be subject to disciplinary action.

Related Policies and Documents:

- AOU Safer Recruitment Policy
- AOU Professional code of Conduct
- Students' Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures
- Confidentiality Policy
- AOU Data Protection Policy
- AOU Policy for preventing and addressing harassment

Acknowledgement

In preparing the policy, the OFS-UK statement of intent was consulted in addition to safeguarding relevant literature from the following universities and organisations:

Safeguarding policy: Protecting Children and Vulnerable Adults-The Open University-UK.

Safeguarding Policy-University of Warwick, UK.

Student Support Services- University of Sheffield, UK.

York College Safeguarding Policy Addendum- York College, UK.

Making safeguarding personal, Guide 2014, Jane Lawson, UK.

Care and Support Statutory Guide, 2018- GOV.UK.

Types of Abuse and Examples: The first Step.Org.UK

¹ The Care Act 2014, Safeguarding Adults-UK

² Working Together To safeguard children 2018, GOV-UK

³ The Care Act 2014, Safeguarding Adults-UK

⁴ The Equality Act, 2010-UK

⁵ Types of Abuse and Examples: The first Step.Org.UK