



OUFC ACADEMY SENIOR APPEARANCES AND TEAM TRAVEL FOR U18s POLICY

Oxford United is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of young people and vulnerable adults and expects all staff, volunteers and visitors to share this commitment.



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Approved and Endorsed by: OUFC Board

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Forward

This Policy reflects the safeguarding ethos of the Club. OUFC is committed to providing a positive, inclusive experience for young people who come into contact with the OUFC Family. The Board of Directors endorse this document as part of the Club's constitution. Oxford United is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of young people and vulnerable adults and expects all staff, volunteers and visitors to share this commitment.

A child centred approach is fundamental to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child. OUFC's Safeguarding Children Policy and Safeguarding Adults Policy are linked to ensure the safety and protection of vulnerable groups. In combination with our other safeguarding policies we provide robust safeguarding procedures for everyone involved in delivering our activities.

January 2021

Matthew Jarvis



INTRODUCTION

This policy is to be read in conjunction with 'OUFC Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy' and other related safeguarding policies.

Safeguarding children across OUFC is given a very high priority. Matthew Jarvis is employed full-time in the Academy to promote best practice and create a safer culture across the Club.

At OUFC operational board level, Niall McWilliams (CEO) leads safeguarding and endorses this Policy and Procedures document.

OUFC has a Safeguarding Management team with senior representatives from around the business to ensure the highest standards are maintained consistently. Actions and decisions made by the Safeguarding Team are relayed to the Board regularly.

OUFC use additional documents and policies which give greater detail to this central policy document. Please refer to those and speak to the Safeguarding Team to clarify any queries.

SAFEGUARDING POLICY STATEMENT

OUFC takes its responsibilities very seriously regarding providing a safe and positive environment where children are present at any of its OUFC led activities and (under the supervision) of one or more members of our staff.

All children, regardless of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion and/or sexual orientation (defined as Protected Characteristics within the Equality Act 2010) have the right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse

All participants and visitors to OUFC's activities have the right to feel safe and to be safe. Wherever they come into contact with us they will be treated both lawfully and fairly and with both dignity and respect. All the members of our staff have a duty to keep children safe and to help protect them from abuse or harm. All managers must ensure that their staff understand and apply that duty.

Good safeguarding practice takes many forms. It is a thread that weaves throughout all OUFC activities that involve children and other vulnerable people.

This policy applies to all members of OUFC Academy, from both the paid and volunteer staff, and all partner organisations including commercial partners, licence holders, contractors and consultants. For the avoidance of doubt this policy does not apply to the RTC; who operate in accordance with their own policies.

It also applies to individuals not included in this list who may be conducting related work that involves the children in our care. The policy has been written in line with all relevant Government legislation including the "Working Together to Safeguard Children" guidance published in July 2018 and EFL expectations. It will be updated annually by the Designated Safeguarding Officer and submitted for approval to the CEO and the EFL. The policy will be reviewed periodically as per EFL guidance.



SAFEGUARDING CONTEXT

The term safeguarding is a shortening of the phrase “safeguarding and promoting the welfare” of children and young people. We follow the 6 principles of safeguarding:

Empowerment: it is important for a young person to be supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and give informed consent

Prevention: it is better to take action before harm occurs

Proportionality: the least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented

Protection: support and representation for those in greatest need

Partnership: local solutions through services working with their communities – communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse

Accountability: accountability and transparency in safeguarding practice



Overview – U18 Debut

If an U18 player gets the opportunity to play or train with the First Team it probably feels to him like the many years of training and coaching have resulted in him achieving his ultimate footballing ambition.

A senior team match is not an activity specifically designed for players U18 therefore some safeguards should be considered, however these will not be as stringent as if you are planning for an activity which is wholly targeted at players U18 years. When inviting a young player under 18 to a senior or first team game you should consider all the risks and put in place some safeguards.

In general terms, open age football is for anyone over the age of 16 years. As an employer you have a 'duty of care' to ensure that you put in place safeguards to protect those young people who are under 18 and who, in law, are still considered to be a child.

Questions have been asked in the past regarding those travelling to an away game, for example;

"When a player U18 is staying overnight at a hotel as part of the senior team, does everyone travelling need a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Criminal Records Check (CRC) and must the First Team Manager have a DBS/CRC then a player who is U18 is involved in a First Team game?"

The answer to both questions is **NO**.

If the debut of the young player is going to occur during an away game, then good practice would be to ensure that one person travelling has a DBS/CRC certificate. Changes to the DBS/CRC (previously known as CRB) means that the certificate is now workforce specific. This means that the document will state if the person has clearance for work with the children's workforce or for work with the adult workforce. Those medical professionals who work with both adults and with U18s will require 'child and adult workforce' on their DBS/CRC certificate. Generally speaking, the club physio is likely to already have an existing CRB or new DBS/CRC certificate.

Speaking with the player, his parents and all other interested parties, before any debut, would ensure that all of those involved will know what to expect, especially if the team is travelling to an away game. It is important to ensure that everybody understands that no single person is solely responsible for the care of the young player. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Therefore, all of those involved should be made aware of their personal responsibilities when a young player is making his debut for the first team. Whilst this guidance is written around a debut appearance, the principle will apply for more regular senior appearances. **Note:** The younger the player is, the more vulnerable he may be.

Additional vulnerabilities to consider include:

1. the excitement and anxiety of playing for the first team or senior squad;
2. his keenness to do well and to impress and please the manager, coaches and team;
3. travelling to an away game as the only U18;
4. wanting to be one of the 'grown-ups', but being cautious and reminded of the code-of-conduct for U18s.

This Toolkit has been designed to help OUFC to prepare and think things through in advance in order to support your club in safeguarding their young players on their debut. This guidance provides information on good working practices which will be regularly reviewed and, where appropriate, improvements made. Suggestions to improve working practice and safety are welcomed from any source. The information contained in this document has been developed with the help of the EFL to support the transition of young players into the adult game. Ensure you read through the whole document before making any plans.



Step 1 - Talking to parents

Talk to parents outlining some of the issues detailed in a) – e) below then follow up with a letter enclosing a consent form. Ask the parents to sign and return the consent form. Template examples of a letter to parents, a consent form and Code of Conduct are enclosed as Appendix 1- 3.

- a) Outline what a great achievement it is that their son has been offered the opportunity to debut or train with the First Team. If the match is an away game, explain that they could be the only U18 travelling (if that is the case). Explain that they may have been called up, but that does not automatically mean they will actually play on the day.
- b) Explain that you understand that their son may be thrilled at the prospect of playing but you are aware that he may be nervous and even a little anxious. Also, tell them that you will be speaking to him (or have already done so) to reassure him and ensure he is comfortable and knows what to expect.
- c) Explain that if away travel is involved he will be in a hotel room alone and will not be sharing with any of the other players. The only exception to this would be if two U18s are travelling with the team, in which case they can share a room.
- d) Explain that you intend to 'buddy up' their son with one of the senior players, another U18 player or a responsible DBS/CRC checked member of staff. Seek their support, explain that you would like them to talk to their son to prepare him and try to ensure he knows that this is a great opportunity and he should enjoy it. They should reinforce the fact that if he is uncomfortable about anything he should talk to someone he trusts.
- e) Explain that the reasons you are going through this process with them is to try to ensure that everything goes as smoothly as possible for his potential first team appearance.

Step 2 - Talking to the player

It is highly likely to have been the Academy Manager or First Team Manager who has informed the player that he has been called up. The information in a) – g) below is a follow up conversation which should be undertaken by either the Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) or by another appropriate person who the player knows and trusts. Therefore, the timescales for talking to players and parents may be interchangeable.

- a) Congratulate the player on being selected to join the first team squad. Explain that he may have been called up, but that does not automatically mean he will actually play on the day. Be diplomatic in preparing them for this possible disappointment.
- b) Discuss with the player that while you understand that he must be very proud at the prospect of playing, you also understand that he may be nervous and even a little anxious.
- c) Explain that you will try to identify a 'Buddy' for him, and this may be a senior player who can provide support for him during his possible debut. Ask him if there is someone he thinks he would feel comfortable with. However, be clear that this may not necessarily be the person who is identified as his 'Buddy'.
- d) Explain to the player that he does not have to tolerate any unacceptable 'banter' or behaviour and that he needs to set his own boundaries and know what 'line' must not be crossed personally. Explain that there may quite a bit of 'down-time' and he should think about what he takes with him to fill the time.
- e) He also needs to know that if the team are travelling to an away game, he will be staying in a separate hotel room and should not share a room with any adult over 18.
- f) Outline what is expected of him in respect of a 'code of conduct'. That is what his personal responsibilities are during the trip. This includes, specifically, ensuring that he understands he must have no access to alcohol (including the mini-bar); no access to adult television or any adult materials; he should not engage in gambling; that he should use



any social media platform in a responsible manner, in line with any club policy and must be careful about comments which may be misinterpreted or insulting to others in any way; clarify that he must not make any inappropriate comments about the football environment. The club may have additional responsibilities to add to this list.

- g) Ensure the player, knows and understands that if he has ANY concerns he can speak to his 'Buddy', or someone else that he trusts.

Step 3 - Talking to the 'Buddy'

As the DSO you will need to identify who may be the most suitable 'Buddy' for the young player. You may need to seek advice on this from the Academy Manager or other members of staff. Remember, however, to be sensitive when making a decision on this issue. The idea is to try to support the player through a well-planned transition and not to create an environment where he 'stands out more' and is the focus of more attention.

Also remember the 'Buddy' should be someone that the player will feel comfortable with, however, it should be one of the senior players. On occasion, it may be an appropriate trusted member of staff.

When you talk to the 'Buddy', it is important to stress that they are not responsible for the care of the young player. You are simply asking them to be a sympathetic ear, if required, and a mentor for the young player.

Step 4 - Talking to the person with the DBS CRC Disclosure

As stated earlier a First Team match or training are not an activity designed for U18s, therefore DBS/CRCs are not required by all of the adults involved. However, to provide additional safeguards, one member of the support team should have an FA CRB DBS/CRC certificate and be cleared through The FA for work in football. Generally, the club physio may hold an appropriate disclosure.

When you talk to the physio, or other person with the appropriate DBS/CRC, it is important to stress that they are not solely responsible for the care of the young player during any trip. The young player will not need constant independent supervision. You are simply asking them to be available for the young player, if required.

Young people over 16 years of age are often capable and legitimately entitled to live independently. A one night stay in a hotel room alone is something young players may already have done as part of family holidays.



Step 5 - Talking to the Manager and the team

Realistically, it may be only a few days before a game when you are informed that a young player is going to be called up. Therefore, the best approach for ensuring everyone knows and understands their responsibilities when a young player is called up is to ensure that as DSO you address this issue during an in-house safeguarding training session.

Through well planned training and using this guidance as part of a club education programme, you should be better prepared for last minute confirmations of call-up which may occur a couple of days before an important game.

When delivering training, the key message would be:

- a. Young players U18 are defined in law as a children and adults working with children need to not only protect those young players, but to also demonstrate standards of behaviour which do not leave the adults open to allegations against themselves.
- b. If the game involves away travel, players U18 should be in a hotel room alone and should not share with an adult over 18.
- c. An exception to this would be if two U18s are travelling with the team, in which case they can share a room.
- d. Players and staff should not encourage young players U18 to engage in any inappropriate activities such as gambling; the use of alcohol or other inappropriate or illegal substances; or watching or engaging in any inappropriate adult behaviours.
- e. Regardless of what experiences they, as experienced older players, encountered in the past, especially on their debut for the first team, players and all staff should recognise the vulnerability of young players U18 and the risks associated with encouraging young players to engage in inappropriate activities.
- f. It is important to remember that the younger the player, the more vulnerable they will be.
- g. The best way to inspire young players to play well and fulfil their potential is to provide encouragement and praise, especially during times of challenge and anxiety, such as on their debut for the first team. Providing positive role models in the form of more experienced players who demonstrate appropriate behaviour can help the player and the club.

All staff that work with young players are in a position of trust. Young players, parents and carers must have confidence that any professional football club working with children will ensure that they provide a professional, trained workforce that understand their roles and responsibilities when working with U18s.

Planning and preparing for the time when U18s will be called up for a first team, senior appearance or training can only help to provide protection for; the players U18, the senior players, the club, the business and The Brand. It will also provide reassurance for families that their son will be provided with the right guidance and support during his development.

If further clarification on any issue is needed then please contact:

Dan Harris – Academy Manager – dharris@oufc.co.uk

Matthew Jarvis – Designated Safeguarding Officer – mjarvis@oufc.co.uk

Nial McWilliams – CEO and Senior Safeguarding Manager – nmcwilliams@oufc.co.uk



Appendix 1 – Template Parents' Letter

Date:

Dear _____

We are delighted to inform you that _____ has been selected to join the first team squad. We are looking forward to having them with us for the match, but we want to ensure we put appropriate safeguards in place as they are still under 18 years of age.

Please complete the consent form attached to this letter and return it to the Academy Manager and the Designated Safeguarding Officer as soon as possible. An electronic copy with your typed signature, or pen and scanned /photo returned via email will suffice.

This is a fantastic opportunity and we hope he really enjoys the experience. It is important to remember that being called into the squad does not automatically mean that he will play; however, they should be congratulated on this achievement at such a young age. If they do not play, we hope you can reassure him of how well he has done by being selected.

We understand that your child may be nervous and even a little anxious with this new and exciting challenge. In order to support them through this we are hoping to put a few things in place and we hope that you will also talk a few things through with him before the game.

We intend to identify a senior player and appropriate staff, who will act as a mentor and provide assistance where required for your son. This is to provide him with someone he can turn to if he needs advice or support. It would be helpful if you discussed with him what a great opportunity this is, that he should try to enjoy the experience but that if he is uncomfortable about anything or has any concerns then he should talk to this 'buddy' or someone he trusts.

This may involve away travel he will be in a hotel room alone and will not be sharing with any of the other older players. It may be other U18s are travelling with the team, in which case they will share a room.

We will also be providing your son with a Code of Conduct which we expect him to adhere to. This is just to outline standards of behaviour which the club expects of players U18 when placed in an adult environment. It would be helpful if you could support this guidance and reinforce the requirements of the club.

We know this is a great occasion and wish them luck with the opportunity and challenge.

Yours sincerely,

Dan Harris – Academy Manager & Matthew Jarvis – Designated Safeguarding Officer

dharris@oufc.co.uk / mjarvis@oufc.co.uk



Appendix 2 – Template - U18 First Team Appearance Consent Form

OUFC CONSENT FORM

Congratulations to you and your son: he has been selected to join the senior squad in a forthcoming match/first team event. In order that your child may participate in this fixture we are seeking your consent and support in preparing him for the game. It is essential that you complete and return this form to (name of person and contact details), supplying relevant information and your consent as parent/legal guardian.

- By consenting to this I am stating that my child is in good health and that he is not participating contrary to medical advice.
- In the unlikely event of an accident occurring, I give my permission for a designated representative of the club to authorise emergency medical treatment, including the use of anaesthetic if deemed necessary.
- Appearance as part of the senior squad will include TV and use of photographs/digital images. A separate images consent form should have been signed by you at the start of the season/contract, if not ensure you speak to the DSO to request that consent form also.

Player/Child's name Date of birthAge

Name of parent/guardian: Relationship to child:

Address:

Emergency contact telephone no. Mobile tel:

Please provide a second emergency contact name and telephone number:

Name Relationship to child

2nd Emergency contact telephone no. Mobile tel:

Please note: It is essential that we are able to contact one of these two numbers in the event of an emergency.

If your child has any medical conditions that may need to be taken into account, please give details below. The following information will assist the party leaders in caring for your child.

Special dietary needs:

Does your child suffer from: Asthma Hay fever Diabetes Epilepsy Nut Allergy ?

Any other allergies (e.g. Penicillin/nuts/anaesthetic)

Please add any other relevant information:

Important information to parents: The use of any regular medication by a professional player must be reported to the club medical team to ensure that anti-doping regulations are met. You must inform the team manager of the use of any medications including over the counter purchases.

I consent to my child participating as a member of the first team/senior squad on this occasion **and for the rest of the season or scholar contract if required.**

Signature: Date: Please write your name in full

Office us only: Ensure a copy of this is given to the Designated Safeguarding Officer and a copy kept on the player file.



Appendix 3 – Template - Code of Conduct U18 Player Senior Appearance

Congratulations on being selected to join the senior squad for the forthcoming match / event. When representing OUFU at a senior level we expect certain standards of behaviour and we have outlined below a code of conduct which we expect you to maintain.

- Represent the club in a manner and to a standard expected by a professional football club.
- Recognise that whilst being invited into the squad, you may not be selected to play. Understand that the Manager's decision is final and that any response to any such decision will be that expected of a professional footballer.
- Understand that you must not engage in any inappropriate adult activity and that you **must not** consume alcohol; access adult literature of any kind or engage in gambling whilst with the first team.
- Agree to only use any social media platform in a responsible manner and not post any comments which may be misinterpreted or are insulting to others in any way, including making inappropriate comments about the football environment.

This is an exciting and challenging time for you, however it is important that you understand that if you have any concerns you can speak to someone you trust or to the manager.

- We hope to identify a 'Buddy' or appropriate person who will act as a mentor for you. If you need advice or support they will be available to provide this.
- It is critical that you understand that you do not have to tolerate any unacceptable 'banter' or behaviour. Know your own boundaries and don't be afraid to talk to someone you trust if you have any concerns.
- If you are travelling away, you should be staying in a separate hotel room and must not share a room with any adult over 18. If there are other under 18 players travelling, you may be expected to share a room.

If you have any concerns and would like to discuss these issues further then you can contact the Designated Safeguarding Officer or the Academy Manager.

Enjoy the experience, and good luck if you are selected to play during the match.



Appendix 4 – Version history

Version	Date	Author	Status	Comment
1.0	January 2021	M Jarvis DSO	Draft	New policy required as per EFL plan

