

Attendance and Engagement Policy

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Section 1: Overview2

1.1 Purpose and general principles.....2

1.2 Responsibilities.....4

Section 2: Procedure6

2.1 Requesting an absence.....6

2.2 Logging attendance at teaching days7

2.3 Catching up on missed learning.....7

2.4 Managing absence and engagement concerns.....7

Section 3: Practice Learning Experience extension9

Section 4: Maximum period of registration 11

Section 5: Annex..... 11

5.1 Definitions 11

5.2 Relevant Frontline policies and documents 12

5.3 Skills Days 12



Section 1: Overview

1.1 Purpose and general principles

- 1.1.1 Engagement with the learning opportunities offered on the programme is a key factor in participants' success. Participants are social workers in training, and professionalism is a key expectation in this context. For these reasons, Frontline monitors attendance in placement and at teaching days, both in person and online. This policy sets out Frontline's expectations of how participants will engage with their studies, and the supportive interventions we will make when attendance and engagement falls below the expected level for whatever reason.
- 1.1.2 Expectations that participants will engage fully with the programme and attend all scheduled teaching activities except where prevented from doing so by exceptional circumstances, apply across all three years of the programme. This policy also sets out the specific expectations and procedures relating to participants in years 1 and 3 whilst registered as students of Lancaster University. Operational procedures relating to participants in year 2 will be published on the Year 2 page of the Virtual Learning Environment.
- 1.1.3 Absence from the programme can negatively impact participants' ability to pass assessments and practice social work of the highest quality. Frontline therefore monitors participant attendance and engagement for the programme's duration, so that staff can support and provide early intervention to participants who may be experiencing difficulties and may be at risk of not completing the programme successfully. Monitoring of attendance includes both days in placement (including Contrasting Learning Experience) and at teaching days, whether in person or online. Monitoring of engagement includes submission of assessments, use of virtual learning environments, and any other activities which form part of the programme.
- 1.1.4 Frontline recognises that in rare occurrences, there may be **exceptional circumstances** which would require absence from placement/teaching and therefore mean that a participant is unable to attend a timetabled activity (e.g., important milestones, ill health, exceptional caring responsibilities or family emergencies). For the procedure around this please refer to [section 2](#) of this policy.
- 1.1.5 In year 1, the minimum attendance requirement is:



- Placement: full-time, daily attendance in placement from the start of September (usually the first Monday of September) to the last working day of August, which must total **at least 200 days in practice**. This minimum figure is set by Social Work England (SWE). Meeting this minimum is a key requirement of year 1, and participants cannot pass core modules of the programme, progress to year 2, or qualify and register as social workers until this minimum is met. The 200 days include a minimum of 30 days of Contrasted Learning Experience (CLE – the days in placement with adult-focused services). The remaining 170 days will usually include attendance at 30 of the teaching days which have been approved by SWE as ‘Skills Days’.
- Teaching days: **at least 80% attendance**. ‘Teaching days’ include the Readiness for Practice residential, and all teaching days from the start of the Readiness for Practice stage onwards, whether online or in person, and whether or not they are categorised as Skills Days by SWE.
- At the start of year 1 Frontline places particular emphasis on **compulsory attendance at the Readiness for Practice residential, online teaching days and regional in-person teaching days**, as this is where participants learn the core foundations of social work practice and where they form integral working relationships with their fellow cohort. It would not be expected that a participant would miss any Readiness for Practice teaching days except in the most exceptional circumstances.

- 1.1.6 In year 2, participants are expected to attend all webinar sessions; however, in the event of a clash or over-lapping content, we would expect participants to prioritise their local authority ASYE programme and participants will be excused from attending the day, or part of the day, where content overlaps. Participants should inform Frontline in advance of any expected absences (see [section 2.1](#)).
- 1.1.7 In year 3, Frontline’s minimum attendance requirement is **at least 80% attendance** of scheduled teaching days.
- 1.1.8 In year 1, participants are expected to be in placement every working day (Monday – Friday) from the first Monday of September to the last working day of August, with the following exceptions:
- Teaching days (including those designated as Skills Days), whether in person or online
 - Days which are not considered a working day by the local authority (usually national bank holidays)
 - Participants are permitted to take up to 5 days’ study leave, with dates (which should not coincide with any teaching days) to be approved by their consultant social worker



- Participants are permitted to take up to 25 days' holiday, with dates to be approved by their consultant social worker.
- Approved leave for sickness, parenting and caring responsibilities, as approved by their consultant social worker.

1.1.9 Frontline does not consider that there are any circumstances in which absence from a Year 1 teaching day could be considered an approved absence if the participant instead attends placement. Any difficulties in accessing or attending teaching days, whether online or in person, should be reported at the earliest opportunity to Frontline so that appropriate adjustments and supports can be put in place.

1.1.10 In years 2 and 3, participants' absence from work is managed in accordance with the local authority/employer policy. Statutory and locally agreed entitlements apply as to other employees.

1.1.11 Approach Social Work cannot be completed on a part-time basis.

1.2 Responsibilities

1.2.1 This policy is owned by the chief social worker, who is responsible for its implementation.

1.2.2 Frontline's staff and partners are involved in implementing its procedures for monitoring and supporting participant attendance and engagement. At different times in the programme, this may include consultant social workers, coaches, and Frontline's practice tutors, dissertation supervisors and other staff.

1.2.3 Frontline is responsible for:

- establishing and communicating clearly the attendance and engagement requirements of the programme to participants;
- notifying participants of all timetabled days in advance of their occurrence to help in the meeting of this expectation;
- monitoring the attendance and engagement of participants and maintaining appropriate records for reference;
- taking action to support participants, as per the processes set out in [section 2.4](#), when concerns with a participant's attendance and/or engagement are identified;



- making decisions about the adequacy of a participant's attendance and/or engagement, taking into account the circumstances of the individual alongside the requirements of the programme;
- where relevant, progressing participants under an alternative Frontline Policy where the concerns continue and/or increase;
- where breaches of this policy occur, to report concerns to Lancaster University, and where appropriate request that the participant is either **deemed withdrawn** or **excluded** (see [section 5](#) for definitions).

1.2.4 Participants are responsible for:

- consistently and proactively engaging with requirements associated with the academic and practice elements of the programme;
- preparing for, attending and actively participating in all scheduled teaching events, whether in person or online, including during the Readiness for Practice residential;
- engaging with learning activities outside of scheduled events, as guided by practice tutors/dissertation supervisors (including, but not limited to, reading/reviewing materials available through the virtual learning environment or provided by the Lancaster University Library);
- ensuring they have an understanding of the programme contents (e.g., structure, curriculum, academic modules, practice requirements) and where uncertain, seeking clarity from a relevant member of staff;
- preparing for, completing and submitting all academic assessments;
- notifying Frontline/their placement provider of intended absence(s), according to the process described within this policy. Frontline expects participants to use their professional judgement to determine whether an absence is admissible based on the parameters set out in [Section 2](#);
- responding to requests and queries from Frontline teams regarding their attendance and engagement in a timely manner, respectfully and with professional courtesy;
- raising as early as possible with practice tutors (years 1 and 2) or dissertation supervisors (year 3) any challenges/difficulties being faced that are impacting upon their ability to meet the attendance and engagement expectations;
- monitoring the number of absences they have taken, and being conscious of this with relation to expectations for their attendance for the remainder of the year;
- reviewing online learning materials and discussing their learning with their practice tutor/dissertation supervisor when they have been absent from all or part of a teaching day, in order to mitigate the absence to the extent possible;
- maintaining up-to-date contact details with Frontline and Lancaster University and checking their Lancaster University email account regularly for information.



Section 2: Procedure

2.1 Requesting an absence

2.1.1 All absences should be reported to the parties noted below. Absences should be reported ahead of the day where practicable and normally no later than the day of absence.

2.1.2 Depending on a participants' stage within the programme, they will need to submit a notification of intended absence via email to the relevant member(s) of staff as outlined below:

Readiness for Practice stage	Participants should email frontlineops@thefrontline.org.uk .
Teaching days	Participants should contact their practice tutor/dissertation supervisor <u>and</u> regional coordinator via the regional inbox: southregion@thefrontline.org.uk for London and the South ; northregion@thefrontline.org.uk for the Midlands, North East and North West.
Placement (year 1)	Participants should contact their Consultant Social Worker. The Consultant Social Worker and participant should discuss the likely duration of the absence and consider the effect this may have on the participant's ability to undertake and complete the programme requirements. Consultant Social Workers maintain a record of days in placement and are responsible for confirming at the end of year 1 that the minimum 200 days in placement have been completed.

2.1.3 Once informed of an absence, Frontline will

- remind the participant of their current level of attendance, and the programme requirements regarding attendance and the review of materials for teaching not attended
- assess whether the level of attendance has fallen to a level at which supportive interventions may be required (see below).

2.1.4 Participants may be asked to provide evidence to support their absence where appropriate and necessary.



- 2.1.5 Any participant who is suffering from a serious infectious illness (e.g., measles, malaria) or who is absent because of contact with a person suffering from such illness must immediately notify Frontline, and must send a medical certificate to the regional inbox (southregion@thefrontline.org.uk or northregion@thefrontline.org.uk) before returning, stating that there is no longer any risk of infection being conveyed to other persons.

2.2 Logging attendance at teaching days

- 2.2.1 For **online teaching days**, Frontline will monitor participants' attendance via Zoom usage reports. Frontline can identify participants, and the times at which they were in attendance at online teaching, through the details they use to log into Zoom (full name and Lancaster University student ID/email address), and teaching staff will also monitor participation in interactive learning activities.
- 2.2.2 For **in-person and asynchronous teaching days**, Frontline will ask participants to register their attendance via a QR code that will be provided and signposted to them - at a variable point during the day for in-person days, or after 80% of the e-learning has been completed for asynchronous days. It is the responsibility of the participant to make sure they log their attendance for these teaching days. QR codes should not be shared with participants who are not in attendance, and to do so, or to use a QR code to register attendance when not in fact present at the teaching day, is behaviour which may trigger referral to disciplinary or fitness to practise procedures.

2.3 Catching up on missed learning

- 2.3.1 If participants are prevented by exceptional circumstances from attending teaching days (whether online or in person), they must catch up on missed learning. They should do this via the resources available on Moodle, and through watching any video recordings of the missed day that are available. Participants are strongly encouraged to discuss the content of missed teaching days with their practice tutors/dissertation supervisors, who can work with them to identify how best to catch up. Participants should self-certify that they have caught up on missed teaching days via the forms provided, which are reviewed ahead of Progress Reviews.

2.4 Managing absence and engagement concerns



- 2.4.1 Frontline may determine that a participant's engagement has fallen below acceptable levels if:
- they are absent from teaching days or from placement without notifying relevant staff (see 2.1.2) or without providing a satisfactory explanation of their absence;
 - following absence, they fail to catch up on missed learning, or to report that they have done so;
 - they are absent on multiple occasions, such that they risk not meeting programme requirements – this is a matter of concern regardless of the reasons for the absence or whether the participant has followed the correct procedures in reporting their absence and catching up on missed learning;
 - they have failed to submit one or more academic assessments;
 - they do not respond within a reasonable time period to communication which requires a response;
 - a combination of these.
- 2.4.2 Where there are emerging or continuing concerns around a participant's level of attendance and engagement they may be subject to several steps of intervention, within which attendance and engagement concerns will be explored alongside possible mechanisms of support. Frontline will work with the participant to determine whether any additional support is needed and can be put in place to prevent future absences, or whether alternatives such as a temporary break from study ('intercalation') would better support the participant's wellbeing.
- 2.4.3 Where a **single unauthorised absence** has occurred participants may be contacted by Frontline for a satisfactory explanation.
- 2.4.4 Where attendance continues to decline beyond this, and there are **emerging concerns** around a participant's attendance and/or engagement, they will normally receive **several email communications** from Frontline, reminding them of Frontline's expectations and to ascertain whether there are any reasons for this change, and to offer support. The participant's practice tutor/dissertation supervisor will be made aware of the emerging concerns.
- 2.4.5 If the situation does not improve sufficiently, participants will normally be invited to an **informal meeting**, usually with the practice tutor/dissertation supervisor, to explore what support might be put in place to enable the participant to re-engage with the programme and catch up on missed learning. This meeting will typically result in an action plan being agreed with the participant.



Alternatively it may be agreed that it would be more conducive to the participant's wellbeing to pause their studies until the following academic year ('intercalation').

- 2.4.6 Where there are **persistent concerns** around a participant's attendance and/or engagement (i.e., the above steps of escalation noted in clauses 2.4.2 – 2.4.5 have been completed with little or no improvement), Frontline will consider **exclusion** (see [section 5.1](#)) from the programme on the grounds of making insufficient academic progress.
- 2.4.6 While a participant is registered as a student of Lancaster University, exclusion must be ratified by the university's Standing Academic Committee.
- 2.4.7 Where a participant, without reasonable explanation:
- fails to respond to multiple communications; and/or
 - stops attending teaching days without first discussing this with Frontline and then fails to respond to multiple communications; and/or
 - leaves/stops attending their placement/employment without first discussing this with Frontline and their placement provider and then fails to respond to multiple communications;
- The participant will be **deemed withdrawn** (see [section 5.1](#) for definition).
- 2.4.8 A participant can be deemed withdrawn from Approach Social Work in any year.
- 2.4.9 If a year 1 participant is deemed withdrawn, Frontline will discontinue the payment of the participant's bursary.
- 2.4.10 There may be some instances where a participant's attendance and engagement issues indicate a need to be referred to a more appropriate policy (such as Fitness to Practise or Fitness to Study). Frontline will review attendance and engagement concerns on a case-by-case basis to determine where this may be appropriate.

Section 3: Practice Learning Experience extension

- 3.1 During year 1, the Placement Learning Experience allows participants easily to meet the required minimum of 200 placement days (including 30 Skills Days) unless they have a significant number



of absences from placement beyond those expected (as set out above). If it becomes clear that because of unexpected absences a participant will not complete the required placement days by the end of August, Frontline's Placement Scrutiny Committee (PSC) may exceptionally consider a short extension to the participant's practice learning experience.

- 3.2 An extension can normally be granted for a maximum period of 30 calendar days to allow the participant to complete the minimum days in placement and qualify as a social worker before progressing to year 2.
- 3.3 If the maximum 30 day extension will not enable the participant to meet the minimum 200 days in placement, the participant will normally be required to intercalate.
- 3.4 For an extension to be considered by Frontline's Placement Scrutiny Committee, a recommendation should normally be made by the participant's practice tutor, typically following practice review 4.
- 3.5 Practice tutors should state in their referral whether they believe that the participant will be able to demonstrate the end of placement PCFs by the end of the recommended extension. This will be considered by the Placement Scrutiny Committee. Where it is clear that a participant will not be able to demonstrate the end of placement PCFs even with a placement extension, an extension is unlikely to be approved.
- 3.6 For an extension to be approved by Frontline's Placement Scrutiny Committee, a stage two practice educator must be available to support the participant within the placement for the duration of the extension period. Where a stage two practice educator is not available to support an extension to placement, but the Placement Scrutiny Committee believes that the participant should have the opportunity to complete, the participant will be permitted to intercalate and would complete their placement on their return (see [intercalation policy](#)). If a participant chooses not to intercalate, then clause 3.7 will apply.
- 3.7 If an extension cannot be approved, a participant who at 31 August has not completed 200 days in practice and/or has not met the [end of placement](#) PCFs, will be deemed by the Placement Assessment Panel (PAP) to have failed to meet the requirements for completion of year 1 and a failure will be recommended as the result of the final assessment element (FLSW 926.1 Practice



Learning Portfolio). Ratification of the failure by the examination board would result in a fail and exit from the programme.

Section 4: Maximum period of registration

- 4.1 Lancaster University's academic regulations set the maximum period of registration for all taught students at the normal length of the programme, plus two years. This gives a maximum period for Approach Social Work of five years. Any extended periods of time away from study (i.e., intercalation and parental leave) are not included when calculating a student's period of registration.

Section 5: Annex

5.1 Definitions

- 5.1.1 **Deemed withdrawn:** a participant is assumed to have withdrawn where there is a breach of the attendance and engagement policy, and the participant has:
- failed to respond to multiple communications;
 - stopped attending recall days without reasonable explanation and failed to respond to multiple communications;
 - left/stopped attending their placement/employment without reasonable explanation and failed to respond to multiple communications.
- 5.1.2 **Exclusion:** where a participant is excluded from the programme. At that time if they are registered as a student of Lancaster University, they cease to be a student of the University on exclusion. This will be in rare circumstances, for example: where a participant has failed to meet the requirements of the programme; academic failure following reassessment; breached the attendance and engagement policy and there are persistent concerns around a participant's attendance and/or engagement with little to no improvement following an escalation of the concerns; breached of the participant discipline policy; not met the conditions of return following a period of intercalation or extended leave; a placement not being available following a period of intercalation or extended leave. The decision to exclude a participant who is registered as a



student of Lancaster University can only be taken by a Lancaster University examination board, Lancaster University's Standing Academic Committee, or the Lancaster University Board of Discipline. A participant who is not currently registered as a student of Lancaster University can be excluded from the programme as an outcome of the Fitness to Study, Fitness to Practise or Disciplinary procedures.

5.2 Relevant Frontline policies and documents

5.2.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies and guidance:

- Intercalation policy
- Withdrawal Policy
- Fitness to Study
- Fitness to Practise
- Pregnancy and parenting policy
- Practice Learning Experience Agreement (PLEA).

5.3 Skills Days

The 30 year 1 Teaching Days constitute Skills Days and can therefore be counted towards minimum 200 days in placement. A full list of Skills Days can be found in the Year 1 programme handbook.