

Intercalation Policy

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Section 1: Overview

1.1 Purpose and general principles

- 1.1.1 This policy outlines the circumstances in which a request from a participant to take an extended break from study, known as an **intercalation**, may be considered, or in which Frontline may require a participant to intercalate, and to explain the associated procedures.
- 1.1.2 Children and families value consistency when it comes to having a social worker involved in key decisions in their lives. The commitment to the full programme (of two years for the Frontline programme or three years for Approach Social Work) should therefore normally be fulfilled consecutively, so that the benefits felt by children of a stable relationship are not compromised.
- 1.1.3 Frontline recognises that there are exceptional circumstances whereby fulfilment of the consecutive commitment is not always possible, nor always to the benefit of the participant and/or the children and families they serve. Frontline therefore offers a process of intercalation, to allow participants to return and complete the programme at a more appropriate time, where other support mechanisms have been exhausted.
- 1.1.4 During the programme, participants are normally eligible for only one intercalation, usually lasting one academic year, provided their request meets the cited criteria, and is approved by Frontline.
- 1.1.5 Participants should refer to the [Pregnancy and Parenting policy](#) for further information on time away from study where this is due to becoming a parent. Participants may normally take one period of intercalation during the programme **in addition** to periods of parental leave.
- 1.1.6 Intercalations are not the same as deferrals. A deferral means a request that the application and/or prospective place of a provisionally registered participant is deferred to the following entry year. The [Recruitment and Admissions policy](#) sets out the provisions and procedures of how to apply for a deferral, which must be received prior to the first day of Readiness for Practice.
- 1.1.7 Frontline will not grant an intercalation from study to address academic failure unrelated to other exceptional circumstances.



- 1.1.8 Information shared by participants in requesting or returning from intercalation will be held confidentially and shared only with those involved in decision making around intercalation and return to study. This may include those outside Frontline, where partner organisations such as Lancaster University and relevant local authorities are involved. Information which constitutes disclosure of a possible disability will be referred to Lancaster University's Disability and Inclusive Practice Service as required, so that appropriate adjustments can be made during the intercalation process and on return to the programme. Information which raises a credible concern around the safety of participants or others may be shared with emergency contacts or external agencies as necessary to mitigate risks.

1.2 Responsibilities

- 1.2.1 The head of delivery normally makes the final decision about whether to approve an intercalation request from a participant, and forms part of the return to study panel that determines whether participants are permitted to return to the programme following a period of intercalation.
- 1.2.2 The partnerships and placement manager (PPM) acts as the local authority liaison for intercalation requests. Normally, their role is to inform the local authority of intercalation requests made by the participant or Frontline, and work with local authorities to establish the availability of suitable practice learning experience or employment opportunities upon a participant's return.
- 1.2.3 The principal practice tutor (PPT) provides input into the participant's conditions and date of return. Their role normally includes reviewing the standardised return conditions to determine whether any additional conditions are required, and to confirm additional return information (e.g., expected return date).
- 1.2.4 Practice tutors/dissertation supervisors, and consultant social workers/line managers provide guidance to participants where they are exploring a potential intercalation. They may also be asked to provide commentary around their knowledge of a participant: e.g., on a participant's health where a participant is required to undergo an occupational health assessment upon their return.



- 1.2.5 The role of the academic registry team is to ensure participants receive formal correspondence pertaining to their intercalation. Along with this, they may review intercalation requests to advise PPTs and HoDs on eligibility requirements and conditions of return. The registry team will update Lancaster University on a participant's status at the start and end of intercalation.
- 1.2.6 The role of the admissions and support team is to support with processing condition of return checks. They will review return to study form information, and where there are changes to a participant's conduct and/or health, will invoke any additional checks as necessary such as referring for an occupational health report. In year 1 this will also include completing a new DBS check. They may also attend or chair return to study panels, where relevant.

1.3 Intercalation criteria

- 1.3.1 A participant may normally be granted one period of intercalation during the programme of study if they satisfy all the following criteria:
- they are facing unforeseen and exceptional circumstances. Significant health issues or substantial changes in personal circumstances are normally considered as grounds for an intercalation;
 - the required length of absence is longer than Frontline could accommodate by other means;
- 1.3.2 There are some instances where Frontline will require a participant to intercalate, such as following the outcome of a Fitness to Practise panel. In these circumstances, the criteria within clause 1.3.1 does not need to apply.
- 1.3.3 Participants who intercalate (irrespective of whether requested by the participant or by Frontline) should be aware that:
- all conditions of return must be met before they can re-join the programme;
 - they normally cannot sit exams, attend classes or submit work when intercalated;
 - intercalation freezes the academic record, so that assessments which have been passed will normally not be taken again after their return;
 - they will retain the number of attempts remaining at the time of intercalation for assessments;
 - If the participant had a resubmission opportunity outstanding at the point of intercalation, it will be available to them on their return;
 - no credit will be awarded for any partially completed modules at the point of intercalation;
 - those who have submitted assessments during the academic year up to the effective date of the intercalation will receive marks for them;



- If registered with Lancaster University they will continue to be classed as a “student” during their intercalation and so will retain entitlement to student-related benefits (e.g., council tax exemption) and will have access to their Lancaster student email, virtual learning environment (Moodle) and student portal including online library access and borrowing rights but not to wellbeing support services;
- if registered with Lancaster University at the point of intercalation, they will remain a member of the university but with suspended registration;
- If not registered with Lancaster University at the point of intercalation, they will retain access to areas of the Frontline virtual learning environment relevant to their year of study, but not to Frontline wellbeing services such as coaching;
- where they are undergoing the proceedings of another Frontline policy (for example, Fitness to Practise), an intercalation may be approved but the proceedings of the other policy will continue during the intercalation;
- they should refer to [Frontline’s bursary and financial policy](#) for information on the possible financial implications of intercalation;
- they should refer to [Frontline’s Attendance and engagement policy](#) for further details on attendance requirements for the course;
- where an intercalation is approved and a return is confirmed, this is always subject to the availability of a local authority placement.

1.3.4 Participants must return at the point of the programme determined by Frontline.

- For Year 1 participants who intercalate before completing Readiness for Practice (before progressing to Stage 1 of the Practice Learning Experience), return will be in the following July, at the start of the next Readiness for Practice stage.
- For Year 1 participants who intercalate during Stage 1 (before progressing to Stage 2 of the Practice Learning Experience), return will usually be in the following September, at the start of the next Stage 1. In exceptional cases a later return may be considered, but participants are asked to be aware that this may make it harder to secure a suitable placement.
- For Year 1 participants who have progressed to Stage 2 of the placement learning experience, return will usually be a point as close as possible to 12 months after intercalation.
- Participants who have completed Y1 and qualified as social workers may be able to take shorter periods of intercalation and return within the same academic year, or at an earlier point of the following year.
- In all cases, length of intercalation and dates of return will be determined on a case-by-case basis, to balance the wishes of the participant and the need for time away from studies with the optimal opportunity to return to study successfully.

Section 2: Procedure



2.1 Requesting an intercalation

- 2.1.1 If participants wish to intercalate, they should first discuss this with their CSW/ line manager and Practice Tutor /dissertation supervisor at the earliest opportunity. Participants should review their practice learning experience agreement and balance the circumstances which lead them to request an intercalation with the needs of the children and families they are in contact with when deciding a leaving date. Where possible, participants are expected to be reasonably flexible in agreeing to a leaving date that minimises disruption, to complete any work not suitable to be handed over (including appropriate communication with families), and to return equipment in a timely way.
- 2.1.2 Where a participant is facing exceptional and unforeseen circumstances that means it is not possible for them to continue on programme at that time, they should submit a [time away from studies request form](#), confirming the reasons for their intercalation request along with supporting evidence related to the criteria set out in [clause 1.3.1](#).
- 2.1.3 Members of the participant's delivery team, as necessary, will receive notification of this request and sight of the supporting information submitted. Information included in the request will also be shared as appropriate with those involved in the return to study process, including key staff in prospective local authorities (where a placement is being sought).
- 2.1.4 If a participant has previously had an approved intercalation (this does not include extended parental leave), a member of Frontline's academic registry team will normally liaise with the participant's head of delivery to determine whether there is legitimate, exceptional reason for the further request. If the head of delivery determines there are not such reasons, the request will be declined at this point.
- 2.1.5 Where it is deemed necessary, a member of the delivery team (normally the principal practice tutor), will attempt to contact the participant to ensure that they are aware of the implications of an intercalation.
- 2.1.6 Once key information has been obtained, the principal practice tutor will review the participant's application and the standardised return conditions to determine whether any additional conditions are required. Along with this, they will confirm key additional information (e.g., expected return date). Principal practice tutors may reach out to discuss the request with the participant, where



additional information would assist them in setting conditions of return or considering the request, and if so, notes of the conversation will be attached to the intercalation request.

- 2.1.7 The principal practice tutor will then submit this information onto Frontline's record system for the head of delivery to review.
- 2.1.8 The head of delivery will either approve or decline the intercalation request, taking into consideration whether (1) the intercalation request satisfies the criteria cited in [clause 1.3.1](#), and (2) whether the request includes all necessary information.
- 2.1.9 A participant cannot appeal the decision to decline an intercalation request.

2.2 Conditions of return

- 2.2.1 All participants will be required to evidence their readiness to return to study and practice prior to returning to the programme. Evidence can be provided by meeting the following **conditions**:
 - 1. To undergo a new **enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check** (in year 1 this will be co-ordinated by Frontline, in years 2 & 3 it will be the responsibility of the local authority to complete. In both cases it is the responsibility of the participant to supply accurate information in a timely way.);
 - 2. To complete a **return to study form**, where participants will be asked to confirm whether there have been any changes in their conduct and health, along with whether there have been changes in any other key information that Frontline needs to know (e.g., a change of address, or a move to a different part of the country), and to provide additional information as requested where it is needed to assist in securing an appropriate placement;
 - 3. To submit a **short reflective account** (normally between 500 and 1000 words) in preparation for their return to study in which they reflect on the reasons for intercalation, and indicate how they have kept up to date with social work practice during their intercalation and how they intend to ensure attendance requirements are met on their return. A template will be provided for this, along with an opportunity to update the participant profile.
 - 4. If an intercalation is due to health, or there have been changes to health during the intercalation period, participants will usually also need to undergo an **occupational health [OH] assessment**. A condition of return will be for relevant content from the OH report (usually a summary of key



findings and recommendations; occasionally the full report where additional contextual information is needed) to be shared within Frontline and, where appropriate, with relevant partners. Relevant partners would include Lancaster University and prospective local authority placement providers, to ensure that appropriate adjustments and support can be in place for returning participants.

5. Participants are also required to meet any additional conditions that have been set

2.2.2 Participants' conditions of return should be completed and submitted by the date communicated to them. Where there are delays to returning or resolving conditions of return, subsequent deadlines may be set for response, and if these are not met the participant may be deemed withdrawn (see section 2.5.3).

2.2.3 In cases where a participant is required by Frontline to intercalate as the outcome of another process, such as [Fitness to Practise](#), Supported Study & [Fitness to Study](#), or to repeat a Stage of the PLE which has not been successfully completed, the registry team will liaise with the PPT to ensure that the return conditions capture any additional conditions/terms agreed prior to sending written confirmation of the intercalation to the participant.

2.3 Approved intercalations

2.3.1 Following approval of a period of extended time away from studies (intercalation), the participant will be sent written confirmation of the details of their time away and the conditions of return. This will contain relevant information, including:

- standardised conditions of return the participant is required to meet in advance of their planned date of return;
- where relevant, any additional conditions of return that have been set;
- expected date of return;
- bursary end date (year 1 only);
- additional steps that will need to be taken where information is disclosed upon a participant's return (e.g., where there is has been a change in health or conduct);
- the participant's academic record at the point of departure.



2.3.2 Where participants intercalate before the end of year 1, Frontline would normally expect them to return to placement in their previous local authority. However, where the time away from studies means that they return to a new cohort, this is not always possible.

If a participant cannot return to complete the year 1 placement learning experience in their previous local authority because this placement is no longer available, Frontline will make reasonable efforts to place the participant into another local authority upon their return. However, placements are provided at the discretion of local authorities and, therefore, Frontline cannot guarantee it will be able to find such a placement (see section 2.5).

2.3.4 Participants who intercalate after registering as qualified social workers (in years 2 or 3) can do so whilst remaining in local authority employment, or to coincide (wholly or in part) with a period away from work, whether through paid or unpaid leave. A condition of return to study will be that the participant is also returning to work as a child-focused social worker, in the same local authority or another which must usually also be Frontline-partnered.

2.3.5 Where a post-qualification participant (in years 2 or 3) wishes to return to complete the programme whilst working as a child-focused social worker in a local authority which is not otherwise Frontline-partnered, they must follow the procedure set out in the Transfer policy for approval of this move, noting the requirement for exceptional circumstances to justify such a transfer. If the transfer request is declined, and the participant does not wish to return to a partnered LA, they will be deemed withdrawn.

2.3.6 Where participants note a change in their circumstances that means they cannot return to their local authority, Frontline will endeavour to locate an alternative local authority placement. This, however, is not always possible.

2.3.7 Where no suitable placement can be found the participant will be required to withdraw from the programme (see 2.5.14 and 2.5.15).

2.3.8 Even where conditions of return are met, the participant's return to programme is always subject to the availability of a local authority placement.

2.4 Declined intercalation applications



- 2.4.1 Where a participant's intercalation request is declined, they remain on programme, and subject to the programme expectations (see, for example, the [Attendance and Engagement policy](#)).
- 2.4.2 If a participant does not wish to continue with the programme, they should withdraw. If new circumstances arise or additional information becomes available, they may make a new request to intercalate.

2.5 Returning from intercalation

- 2.5.1 No later than three months before the intended date of return, Frontline will ask the participant to confirm whether they intend to return to the programme. Where the participant is returning to complete year 1, teams responsible for securing their local authority placement will be in touch as necessary through the year, no later than three months prior to the expected return but in some cases much earlier, to confirm their intention to return. This earlier contact is necessary to support with local authority placement planning, especially where the agreed return date is at the start of the placement learning experience, and participants who do not respond are at risk of being unable to secure a placement for their return.
- 2.5.2 Where a participant confirms that they do not wish to return to the programme, relevant teams will be made aware, and the participant will be withdrawn from the programme.
- 2.5.3 Where a participant does not adequately respond to communication from Frontline in relation to their return to study, (e.g. where no response is received, either to the initial return to study email or subsequent communications, after two reminders) they will be deemed withdrawn (see [Withdrawal Policy](#)). Attempts will be made to contact participants at the contact details held on record – it is the participant's responsibility to update contact details if they change during the period of intercalation (this can be via email to academic.support@thefrontline.org.uk). Relevant teams will be made aware, and the participant will be withdrawn from the programme.
- 2.5.4 If the participant intends to return, conditions of return checks will commence. Frontline will monitor the completion of checks and invite the participant to attend a return to study meeting normally around thirty days in advance of the intended return date.



- 2.5.5 Typically for the completion of these return checks, the participant will liaise with Frontline's admissions and support team, who will support the participant in processing health and DBS checks, if applicable.
- 2.5.6 The participant is responsible for independently completing their return to study questionnaire and reflective account in a timely way.
- 2.5.7 Even where conditions of return are met, the participant's return to programme is always subject to the availability of a local authority placement (in year 1) or their remaining in employment as a child-focused social worker with a Frontline-partnered local authority (years 2 and 3). To support the securing of a suitable placement, Frontline may share with local authorities appropriate information, including but not limited to: the participant's reasons for intercalation; their progress in placement prior to intercalation (e.g. progress reviews); their reflections on their time away; and evidence that conditions of return have been met.
- 2.5.8 Participants who are returning to study (i.e. who have completed conditions of return in part or in full) may in some cases be offered one or more of the following opportunities:
- to complete one or more shadowing days, especially if a placement is being considered at a local authority other than the one where they were placed prior to intercalation.
 - To participate in a reflective conversation, either in person or remotely, with a prospective Practice Tutor or Consultant Social Worker.
 - To complete an inclusion passport, or to work with the Lancaster University Disability and Inclusive Practice Service to consider whether an Inclusive Learning Support Plan (ILSP) would be beneficial in supporting their return to study.

These offers are not guaranteed, and are optional (though strongly recommended) where they are offered, unless they have been a condition of return. Participation may assist in securing a suitable placement in a timely way.

Expenses incurred by the participant, for instance in travel to the place where shadowing will take place, cannot usually be reimbursed, but participants are encouraged to inform Frontline if their



financial circumstances are an obstacle to accepting such an offer.

The return to study meeting

- 2.5.9 Participants will usually receive confirmation of the time and date of their return to study meeting at least 10 working days in advance. If the participant cannot attend, the meeting will usually be rescheduled, but can also reach a decision in the absence of the participant if the Chair deems it appropriate to do so.
- 2.5.10 The return to study meeting will normally be with the principal practice tutor. Depending on the complexity of the conditions of return, and whether additional concerns have arisen during the return checks, a member of the admissions and support team and the head of delivery, or nominee, may also attend. Other relevant Frontline staff may be asked to review the conditions of return submission where the panel deem this necessary.
- 2.5.11 Where required (usually when a placement has not yet been secured), the partnerships and placement manager (PPM) may also be in attendance.
- 2.5.12 Occasionally a member of staff from a local authority which is considering whether or not they are able to offer a placement may attend for all or part of the meeting, to meet the participant and hear their reflections. They do not contribute to the decision as to whether the participant has met the conditions of return.
- 2.5.13 The return to study meeting will review the participant's submission and supporting documentation against the conditions of return to establish whether the conditions of return have been met, and if the participant is approved to return to the programme, subject to the availability of a local authority placement (year 1) or their continued employment as a child-focused social worker, in a Frontline-partnered local authority unless an exceptional transfer has been approved (years 2 and 3). For those who are permitted to return, any ongoing support needs will be identified and, where necessary, support mechanisms put in place.
- 2.5.14 Where the participant is returning to complete year 1, PPMs will have confirmed in advance of the panel whether a placement at the local authority in which the participant was originally



placed, remains available for their return, and if not, will have explored alternatives.

- 2.5.15 If it is confirmed that the participant has met the conditions of return to study, and the local authority placement/employment is still available, or another suitable placement/employment has been found, the participant will be notified of their return to programme. The Chair of the return to study meeting will inform the registry team so that the student record can be updated and, if necessary, the outcome reported to Lancaster University.
- 2.5.16 If it is confirmed that the participant has met the conditions of return to study and a reasonable alternative placement has been found but the participant does not wish to take up the placement, the participant will be deemed withdrawn (see [Withdrawal Policy](#)). Relevant teams will be made aware, and the participant will be withdrawn from the programme.
- 2.5.17 If it is confirmed that the participant has met the conditions of return to study but that a placement (in year 1) or employment in a partnered local authority (after the end of year 1) cannot be found, the participant will be given the option of one further intercalation and Frontline will attempt to secure a placement during this intercalation.
- 2.5.18 If the participant does not wish to take this intercalation, the participant will be deemed withdrawn (see [Withdrawal Policy](#)). Relevant teams will be made aware, and the participant will be withdrawn from the programme.
- 2.5.19 If the participant accepts this further intercalation but a placement still cannot be found, the participant will be required to leave the programme, and will be excluded. Exclusion of a participant who intercalated during a period of registration as a student of Lancaster University must be ratified by a Lancaster University examination board.
- 2.5.20 If the return to study panel determines that a participant has not met the conditions of return to study, the participant will be required to leave the programme, and will be excluded. Exclusion of a participant who intercalated during a period of registration as a student of Lancaster University must be ratified by a Lancaster University examination board.

Ratification of an exclusion by the examination board, where applicable



2.5.21 Frontline's registry team will inform Lancaster University that a participant is to be excluded so that this decision can be ratified by an examination board.

2.5.22 The examination board will consider the recommendation of the return to study panel together with minutes of the panel and details of the case. The role of the exam board is to consider and ratify the recommendation made in respect of the participant. The exam board must also confirm, to its satisfaction, that due process has been followed at the hearing and that all relevant information has been fully considered.

2.5.23 The examination board will either:

- Ratify the recommendation of the Frontline return to study panel that the participant should be excluded; or
- Fail to ratify the recommendation of the Frontline return to study panel and either
 - In the case of a participant who is deemed not to have met the conditions of return, request that the return to study panel is reconvened; or
 - In the case of a participant who has met the conditions of return but for whom a further intercalation cannot be found, request that a further attempt is made to place the participant before moving to exclusion.

2.5.24 A participant whose exclusion is ratified by the examination board will be notified of their exclusion and will be given the opportunity to appeal the decision. Information about the appeals process can be found in the Academic Appeals chapter of Lancaster University's Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures.

2.5.25 Ratification and appeal processes may not be complete by the date originally scheduled for a participant's return. In cases where ratification is declined or appeals are upheld, return to study may be delayed for up to a further year.

Section 3: Relevant references



Frontline policies and documents

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

- Attendance and engagement policy
- Recruitment and Admission Policy
- Bursary & financial policy
- Pregnancy and parenting
- Transfer policy
- Withdrawal policy
- Suitability for professional training policy
- Fitness to study policy
- Exceptional circumstances Policy
- Fitness to practise Policy
- Lancaster University Academic Malpractice Regulations and Procedures, in particular the following chapter:
 - Academic Appeals