

Participant Discipline Policy

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Section 1: Overview

1.1 Purpose and Scope

- 1.1.1 Frontline aims to provide fair and consistent treatment for all participants, staff, and visitors. It also has a duty to take reasonable steps to protect the learning environment from harm and to safeguard those with whom participants work during their Placement Learning Experience [PLE]. To fulfil this Frontline has expectations in relation to the conduct of participants.
- 1.1.2 Frontline formally splits participant discipline into two broad areas, academic and non-academic. Academic discipline, and the related procedures and penalties, is detailed in the [Lancaster University Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures](#) (MARP), the [Frontline Supporting Document – Approved Variations to the Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures](#) and [Frontline policies](#) that have been adopted for the partnership as detailed in the Frontline Supporting Document – Approved Variations to the Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures, and the Lancaster University Standing Academic Committee Terms of Reference. This policy refers to non-academic discipline and the related procedures and penalties.
- 1.1.3 Frontline has the authority to prescribe rules of discipline. Where a participant falls short of expectations Frontline will take disciplinary action that is primarily corrective, but also and as necessary, reasonably punitive.
- 1.1.4 It is important that all members of the Frontline community behave in a polite and courteous way towards everyone. This policy explains how Frontline deals with any concerns about a participant's behaviour.

1.2 Definitions

- 1.2.1 **Discipline** means obeying the rules and professional standards of Frontline as an academic community.
- 1.2.2 **Behaviour** means the physical, verbal, and social conduct of Frontline participants as it affects themselves and others, including both planned and unconscious or accidental actions.



Section 2: Policy and procedures

2.1 General principles

- 2.1.1 This policy applies to the conduct of participants during the entirety of the programme: that is, in years 1, 2 and 3.
- 2.1.2 This policy applies to participant conduct during their time as participants, whether it takes place on a teaching day, Readiness for Practice residential or regional day, local authority placement day (including Contrasting Learning Days based in another agency or organisation), on a working day (once the participant is in employment) or on a non-work day.
- 2.1.3 Participants will be subject to the requirements and policies of the local authority or other agency with whom they are on placement/in employment. However, Frontline retains the right to consider discipline-related issues which arise while the participant is on placement/in employment within the local authority.
- 2.1.4 Any person required to act in any capacity under this policy is subject to an ongoing duty to declare any conflict of interest (such as a prior involvement with the participant concerned, or with any other person involved in the events being investigated) to Frontline's academic registry team (academic.support@thefrontline.org.uk). Where a conflict of interest is established, that person will be excused from the process. This acts to ensure that processes and decisions remain free of bias and are in line with principles of natural justice.
- 2.1.5 Frontline encourages a culture in which all members of its community feel empowered and confident to challenge and/or to report unacceptable behaviour.
- 2.1.6 Reports of possible breaches of these regulations may be reported by other participants, staff of Frontline and Lancaster University, local authorities, children's trusts or external sources, such as members of the public. Where a third-party reports and provides contact information, they may be informed that the matter has been investigated and whether any action was taken. They will not be given the details of these actions.



- 2.1.7 Where it is ascertained that there is insufficient evidence, Frontline reserves the right not to pursue a reported breach.
- 2.1.8 Frontline will take a sensitive approach in enacting this policy and will make all reasonable efforts to maintain confidentiality.
- 2.1.9 Frontline will not tolerate frivolous or malicious reporting. Participants or staff suspected of doing this will be subjected to an investigation of a breach under these regulations or the relevant staff policy.
- 2.1.10 Frontline expects disciplinary matters to be considered promptly and would expect procedures to begin within thirty days of the alleged incident being reported. Frontline reserves the right to consider cases under this policy at a later time, particularly where they are of a serious nature.
- 2.1.11 Reasonable effort will be made to communicate these regulations and all participants are expected to be familiar with them. Ignorance of these regulations will not be deemed an acceptable reason for not behaving in the expected ways.
- 2.1.12 An alleged breach of these regulations may call into question the participant's fitness to practise and as such the Fitness to Practise policy may be invoked. Where the alleged breach is being investigated and determined under the Participant Discipline procedures and implications of fitness to practise emerge, the matter will be referred to the Fitness to Practise policy, which will take account of any previous investigations and determinations.
- 2.1.13 Frontline has a responsibility to manage the risks faced by its staff, participants and visitors, to fulfil its duty of care to staff and participants as well as manage any risk to its reputation and that of Lancaster University. As such, where an alleged breach indicates: a risk of harm to self or others; an ongoing risk of serious disruption to participants or to Frontline's activities; safeguarding issues; a serious risk to the reputation of Frontline, Lancaster University or the social work profession, Frontline will consider any actions required to mitigate or reduce the risk and will refer the matter to the Fitness to Practise policy as a matter of urgency. The participant may consequently be suspended by the Chief Social Worker, where they deem that it is urgent and necessary to do so.



- 2.1.14 These proceedings are internal Frontline processes that, while subject to law, are not themselves legal proceedings. Frontline does not have the legal investigatory powers of the police and does not determine criminal guilt. These proceedings focus on whether Frontline's expectations for participant behaviour have been breached and are not to be regarded as a substitute for a police investigation or criminal prosecution. Frontline reserves the right to refer cases to the police where it is considered they may constitute a criminal offence.
- 2.1.15 Participants subject to the disciplinary process may be accompanied at meetings or hearings by a friend, other supporter, or Students' Union or Union representative. (Representation by Lancaster University Students' Union is usually available only to participants who are currently registered as students of Lancaster University.) This person will be present to support the participant during the hearing and, while it is expected that the participant will answer questions at meetings or hearings, their supporter will be able to represent them and/or address the panel.
- 2.1.16 Where a participant wishes to have legal representation, the participant must inform Frontline no later than 5 working days prior to the meeting or hearing. Frontline reserves the right to have the services of their own legal representative at the meeting or hearing.
- 2.1.17 A participant's failure, without good cause, to attend a meeting or hearing will not prevent the matter proceeding.
- 2.1.18 Decisions taken under this policy by a member of staff or panel shall be made on the basis of the balance of probability and take full account of the principles of natural justice, fairness and equity.
- 2.1.19 The participant will normally be provided with access to all the information gathered as part of the investigation process, although this may need to be restricted in light of information governance requirements (e.g., data protection, confidentiality of service users etc.) in which case amended information, which gives sufficient detail to allow the participant to defend themselves without contravening the relevant information governance regulation, will be provided.
- 2.1.20 Normally witness evidence will be considered through written statements. Exceptionally, and at the discretion of the Chair:
- anonymised witness statements may be considered; and/or
 - witnesses may be allowed to appear in person.



- 2.1.21 Data related to these regulations, including outcomes of participant discipline processes, will be held centrally and will be subject to the constraints of the General Data Protection Regulation and legislation.
- 2.1.22 Intercalation or withdrawal from the programme and Lancaster University will not necessarily stop procedures under these regulations. Where Frontline determines that it is in its interests, the interests of other participant(s) or those of the public, to proceed, it reserves the right to do so.
- 2.1.23 Financial (or similar) implications of any outcome under this policy will not be considered as part of these processes. Such consequences will be the sole responsibility of the participant.
- 2.1.24 The implications related to a participant's intended career choice will also not be considered as part of these processes. Participants should be aware of any professional regulatory requirements, including how disciplinary action could affect their choice of career.
- 2.1.25 If it is considered that inappropriate conduct may have been the result of an undisclosed physical or mental health issue, the participant may be referred for consideration under the Supported Study and Fitness to Study Procedure. Where a participant does not cooperate with the Supported Study and Fitness to Study Procedure, or where it is deemed that the participant had suitable capacity to manage their behaviour, Frontline reserves the right to refer the case back for consideration under the Participant Discipline Policy.
- 2.1.26 Procedures under these regulations may affect a participant's ability to complete the Frontline programme or to register with Social Work England, or the time at which they will do so. In such cases the participant will be notified of this potential outcome.
- 2.1.27 Any participant dissatisfied with Frontlines procedures should consult [Frontline's Complaints Policy and Procedure](#). Disagreement with the outcome of the disciplinary procedure does not constitute a ground for a complaint.



2.2 Breaches of Discipline

2.2.1 The expectation of Frontline is that all participants conduct themselves appropriately and in accordance with all relevant regulations and policies. However, where a participant does not, Frontline may consider this as a breach of the Participant Discipline Policy.

2.2.2 Acts or omissions that may be considered as breaches under this policy include (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Unacceptable behaviour towards participants, staff or members of the public, including verbal or written abuse in any media; bullying of any kind; harassment as defined under the Equalities Act;
- Failure to respect the rights of others to freedom of speech;
- Misuse or unauthorised use of the property, facilities or name of:
 - Frontline; and/or
 - Approach Social Work; and/or
 - Lancaster University; and/or
 - any teaching venue (residential and teaching days); and/or
 - local authorities or any agency providing placement learning or employment as part of the programme.
- Disruption, interference or obstruction of the academic, administrative and other activities of Frontline;
- Anti-social behaviour, including noise disruption;
- Failure to disclose name and other relevant details to an employee of Frontline where to do so would be a reasonable expectation;
- Failure to adhere to the policies and procedures of the local authority or other placement learning experience provider (including Contrasting Learning Experience providers);
- Fraud, deception or dishonesty, including intentionally withholding information in relation to Frontline staff or participants and/or falsification of records or documentation within an application;
- Failure to declare a criminal conviction to Frontline, subject to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act;
- Possessing, consuming or supplying controlled substances;
- Inappropriate behaviour relating to the excessive consumption of alcohol or other substances;



- Any acts or omissions that bring or have the potential to bring Frontline and/or Lancaster University into disrepute, or that damage or have the potential to damage its relationships with local authorities, other placement learning experience providers (including Contrasting Learning Experience providers), or communities;
- Inappropriate use of social media and/or the publication on any online platform of material which brings or has the potential to bring Frontline and/or Lancaster University into disrepute, or that damages or has the potential to damage Frontline's relationships with local authorities, other placement learning experience providers (including Contrasting Learning Experience providers) or communities;
- Any conduct that leads to a criminal investigation or constitutes a criminal offence;
- Failure to comply with any previously imposed requirement or penalty under these regulations, including failure to attend a disciplinary meeting or hearing.

2.2.3 Where criminal or similar proceedings are underway, participants are obliged to inform Frontline of any progress and/or changes of status regarding the case. The chief social worker will review the status and determine if any actions are required and/or may suspend the internal procedure.

2.2.4 A decision by authorities not to pursue a criminal conviction and/or an acquittal in court does not preclude Frontline from pursuing outstanding matters of concern that have not been addressed.

2.3 Disciplinary Procedures

2.3.1 Reports of possible breaches of this policy may be reported by other participants, staff (including staff at local authorities/children's trusts where participants are on placement or in employment), members of Lancaster University or external sources such as visitors, members of the public and should be made in writing to academic.support@thefrontline.org.uk.

2.3.2 Frontline reserves the right not to pursue a reported breach in the light of insufficient evidence.

2.3.3 Upon receipt of an alleged breach, Frontline will appoint an investigating officer to investigate the matters raised. Throughout this process the investigating officer will consider and assess the level of possible risk to the participant and others and may otherwise confirm the parameters of the investigation as they see fit within the remit of this policy.



- 2.3.4 The investigating officer will normally contact the participant to gain their perspective of the incident and whether they accept or contest the allegation.
- 2.3.5 At any point during the process, if the concerns indicate a risk to the participant, other participants, staff members, children and families or the general public, then the participant may be suspended from the programme either temporarily or until the process has been completed. Whilst suspended from the programme, participants would not attend placement and usually would not be expected to attend teaching days (at the discretion of the head of delivery, the participant may be given permission to participate in online teaching days) or to submit academic assessments which fall due. Authorised absences and extended deadlines will be applied as appropriate. For participants in years 2 and 3, suspension from the programme is likely to be accompanied by suspension from employment, but this is at the discretion of the employer.
- 2.3.6 The chief social worker or nominated representative is responsible for making this decision and will consider each case individually.
- 2.3.7 Where participants in year 1 are suspended pending the outcome of disciplinary investigations, the duration of the suspension may mean that it becomes difficult for them to complete the requirements of the practice learning experience (minimum 200 days in placement, including 30 contrasting learning days and 30 skills days) in the time remaining, even if a placement extension (normally a maximum of 30 calendar days) is granted. In such cases, even where the outcome of the process is that the participant may continue on the programme, they may be required to intercalate and return to the programme at an appropriate point in the following year.
- 2.3.8 The investigation should usually be completed within four to six weeks of the incident being reported.
- 2.3.9 Where there is an imminent threat, action to remove that threat should be taken immediately.
- 2.3.10 Upon conclusion of the investigation and the assessment of possible risk, the investigating officer should recommend one of the following outcomes, which will be implemented by the head of delivery:
- Not proven, no further action;



- Referral to the Fitness to Practise Policy on the basis that the incident and outcome of the investigation shows concerns with the participant's fitness to practise and/or a high level of risk. At this point a participant may be suspended (or intercalated) as set out in the Fitness to Practise policy;
- A requirement for the participant to take some reparatory action with regards to the incident (for example, a reflective piece, a letter of apology etc) to be discussed with the practice tutor or principal practice tutor;
- Referral for a formal meeting to be held between the participant and a senior member of Frontline staff; or
- Referral to a hearing held by the Participant Discipline Panel.

Formal Meeting

2.3.11 The matter may be referred to a formal meeting on the following conditions:

- the participant has accepted the recommendation arising from the investigation; and
- there is only one incident or a short series of related incidents; and
- there is no risk of harm to the participant or others; and
- there are no safeguarding issues.

2.3.12 A formal meeting is an opportunity for a senior member of Frontline staff to discuss with the participant the incident in question, any contextual factors and the participant's plans to ensure that the behaviour in question does not recur.

2.3.13 Following a formal meeting the senior member of Frontline staff will determine the outcome of the case, which will include one of the following penalties:

- No further action;
- Formal warning, which will be taken into consideration in any subsequent procedure;
- A requirement to pay for any damages or cleaning charges incurred;
- A ban from a communal area;
- A confiscation of equipment or items causing unreasonable disturbance to others or damage to property;
- A requirement to submit a written apology to those affected;
- A requirement to undertake relevant training and/or development (with the participant paying the associated fee/charge);



- Referral to the Participant Discipline Panel, Fitness to Study Policy or Fitness to Practise Policy;
- Any other penalty deemed appropriate as long as it does not exceed the authority of the formal meeting stage; or
- Any combination of the above.

Participant Discipline Panel Hearing

2.3.14 Matters of a serious nature that cannot be dealt with under one of the other actions and that are not referred to the Fitness to Practice Policy will be referred to a hearing held by the Participant Discipline Panel.

2.3.15 The Participant Discipline Panel will consist of a minimum of three members of Frontline staff.

2.3.16 Following a hearing, the Participant Discipline Panel will determine the outcome of the case, which will include one of the following penalties:

- Not proven, no further action;
- Formal warning, which will be taken into consideration in any subsequent procedure;
- A requirement to pay for any damages or cleaning charges incurred;
- A ban from a communal area;
- A confiscation of equipment or items causing unreasonable disturbance to others or damage to property;
- A requirement to submit a written apology to those affected;
- A requirement to undertake relevant training and/or development (with the participant paying the associated fee/charge);
- A recommendation that the participant be excluded, either permanently or for a period of time from the programme, which will be made to and considered by
 - Lancaster University's Board of Discipline (if the participant is currently registered as a student of Lancaster University); or
- the chief social worker (if the participant is not currently registered as a student of Lancaster University) Referral of the matter to be considered under the Fitness to Practise Policy or other procedures as appropriate (including, if the participant is currently registered as a student of Lancaster University, University procedures such as the Standing Academic Committee);



- Any combination of the above; or
- Any other penalty deemed appropriate and commensurate with the breach.

Administration of the Formal Meeting and Participant Discipline Panel Hearing

2.3.17 The participant will be notified, normally via email, no later than 10 working days before the formal meeting or hearing date and will be provided with the following information:

- Confirmation of the allegation;
- The formal meeting or hearing date, time and location (participants will normally attend remotely);
- That they can be accompanied by a friend, colleague, or Union Representative (including a Students' Union representative, if they are currently registered as a student of Lancaster University), should they wish to do so. Where the participant is to be accompanied by a legally qualified representative, the participant must inform Frontline no later than 5 working days prior to the formal meeting or hearing date. Frontline reserves the right to have their own legal representative at the hearing.
- copies of the evidence which will be considered.

2.3.18 The participant can request to postpone the formal meeting or hearing if they have exceptional circumstances with supporting evidence. Exceptional circumstances may include, but are not limited to:

- serious short-term illness, medical treatment or accident;
- bereavement caused by the death of a close relative or other significant person;
- caring responsibilities which could not reasonably have been anticipated;
- serious domestic events which could not reasonably have been anticipated and which have had a severe impact;
- a short-term exacerbation of a long-term health condition.

The senior member of Frontline staff (for a formal meeting) or panel chair (for a participant discipline panel hearing) must be fair and reasonable in deciding whether or not to grant a postponement or proceed in the participant's absence. A participant who cannot attend can make written submissions.



- 2.3.19 If a participant fails to attend without a reasonable explanation, the formal meeting or hearing may proceed and be concluded in their absence.
- 2.3.20 During the formal meeting or hearing a member of Frontline staff may be in attendance to provide evidence. In the formal meeting or hearing the participant will be informed of the findings of the investigation and be invited to provide a response to the allegation.
- 2.3.21 A decision and penalty will be imposed based on the balance of probability and take full account of the principles of natural justice, fairness, and equity.
- 2.3.22 Penalties for a formal meeting are detailed in 2.3.3 above and may be imposed singularly or in combination.
- 2.3.23 Penalties for a Participant Discipline Panel Hearing are detailed in 2.3.6 above and may be imposed singularly or in combination.
- 2.3.24 The participant will normally be advised verbally of the recommendation of a formal meeting or Participant Discipline Panel hearing at the conclusion of the senior member of Frontline staff's (for a formal meeting) or panel's (for a hearing) deliberations.
- 2.3.25 The participant will be provided with the outcome, in writing, normally within 7 working days of the formal meeting or hearing. The letter will inform the participant of the available next steps.
- 2.3.26 If a participant fails to comply or adhere to the imposed penalties, Frontline may, at the discretion of the head of delivery:
- ☐ refer the matter to or back to a Participant Discipline Panel Hearing
 - ☐ refer the matter to the Fitness to Practise Policy
 - ☐ consider making a recommendation of exclusion from the Frontline programme, either permanently or for a period of time, to Lancaster University's Board of Discipline (for a participant currently registered as a student of Lancaster University) or to the chief social worker.

2.4 Ratification of decisions to exclude



- 2.4.1 Any case for which the Participant Discipline Panel recommends an exclusion from the Frontline programme, either permanently or for a period of time, of a participant currently registered as a student of Lancaster University must be taken to the Lancaster University Board of Discipline for ratification of the recommendation. The exclusion of participants not so registered can be ratified by the chief social worker.
- 2.4.2 The Board of Discipline/chief social worker will consider the recommendation of the Participant Discipline Panel together with minutes of the panel, details of the case and investigation and the response to the charge given by the participant at the panel hearing. The role of the Board of Discipline/chief social worker is to consider and ratify the recommendation made in respect of the participant's progress. The Board/chief social worker must also confirm, to their satisfaction, that due process has been followed at the hearing and that all relevant information has been fully considered.
- 2.4.3 The Board of Discipline/ chief social worker will either:
- Ratify the recommendation of the Frontline Participant Discipline Panel that the participant should be excluded either permanently or for a period of time; or
 - Fail to ratify the recommendation of the Frontline Participant Discipline Panel and request that the original Participant Discipline Panel hearing is reconvened.
- 2.4.4 The participant will be informed of the decision. The outcome will also state the available next steps and/or appeal process. Frontline will inform other parties of the outcome if doing so is deemed necessary to safeguard children or families with whom the participant may work with in future.

2.5 Next Steps

- 2.5.1 Following a formal meeting, a participant may request a review of the decision of the senior member of staff (this will be heard by the Participant Discipline Panel) if they have reasonable belief that there is:
- New evidence that could not reasonably have been made available prior to the meeting;
 - A material procedural irregularity which, had it not occurred, may have significantly affected the decision, outcome or both;



- That the penalty was too severe, given the nature of the allegation or compared to outcomes on other participants in a similar position, or both.

2.5.2 Following a hearing, a participant may request a review of the decision of the Participant Discipline Panel. If the decision of the panel is to exclude, ratification from the Lancaster University Board of Discipline (if relevant) must come first, after which the participant has the right to appeal as set out at 2.5.6. All other outcomes of the Participant Discipline Panel will be reviewed by the programmes operations director (or nominated representative) where a participant submits evidence that:

- New evidence is available that could not reasonably have been made available prior to the hearing;
- A material procedural irregularity has occurred which may have significantly affected the decision, outcome or both;
- The penalty was too severe, given the nature of the allegation or compared to outcomes on other participants in a similar position, or both.

2.5.3 An intention to request a review of the decision of the formal meeting or Participant Discipline Panel hearing by the participant must be submitted in writing to the Frontline Registry team (academic.support@thefrontline.org.uk) within 10 working days of the receipt of the outcome. A timeframe for production of evidence will then be arranged between Frontline and the participant.

2.5.4 The decision of the Participant Discipline Panel (for a review following a formal meeting) and/or programmes operations director (or nominated representative) (for a review following a Participant Discipline Panel hearing) will be final and consist of one of the following decisions:

- The confirmation of the original decision(s); or
- The referral back to the meeting or hearing (if the process has not been followed and/or if new evidence is made available).

2.5.5 A participant may appeal against the outcome of the Lancaster University Board of Discipline by submitting a written request for an appeal with all the relevant details to the Director of Strategic Planning and Governance (or nominated representative) at Lancaster University within ten working days of the receiving the written decision. Full details of the Board of Discipline appeal process are available in the Lancaster University Student Discipline Regulations.



- 2.5.6 If the participant appeals based on the consequent termination of their contract of employment with the employing local authority or other organisation, then this will be dealt with by the relevant procedures within those organisations.
- 2.5.7 The reporting party (e.g., in cases of hate incidents, bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct) cannot request a review of the outcome of the disciplinary process, but can make a complaint under the Frontline Complaints Procedure if they have concerns about how the matter was handled, or the penalties which they understand to have been imposed.

Section 3: Relevant references

3.1 [Frontline policies and documents](#)

- 3.1.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies and guidance:
- Fitness to Practise Policy
 - Fitness to Study Policy
 - Academic Malpractice Policy
 - Suitability for professional practice
 - Complaints policy and procedure
 - Recruitment and Admissions policy
 - Lancaster University Student Sexual Misconduct Policy
 - Lancaster University Dignity in Student Life Policy
 - Lancaster University Student Discipline Regulations (clause 7.5.17-7.5.24)

Section 4: Annexes

4.1 Social media guidelines

- 4.1.1 As potential professionals with a unique social contract and obligation, applicants and participants must be aware of the public nature of social networking sites and online blogs and forums and the permanent nature of information posted to them.



4.1.2 While these sites offer potential to improve communication with friends and colleagues, they are also a potential forum for lapses of professionalism and professional behaviour. These sites may give the impression of privacy, but postings and other data should be considered in the public realm as visible to many people, even under the most stringent of privacy settings.

4.1.3 Frontline has adopted the following guidelines to assist applicants and participants in safely and responsibly using these sites and media. They should be followed when participating in social networks personally and/or professionally, whether using personal devices or devices in the workplace.

- Consider carefully whether to refer to your professional status on social media so as to avoid adverse responses to postings and any allegations of bringing the profession into disrepute;
- Check your privacy settings and restrict access where possible (advisable);
- Avoid endorsing or posting content that is unsuitable for trainees or qualified staff in the social work profession;
- Ensure your actions do not reflect poorly on the reputation of Frontline, or of your practice learning setting(s) (including your Contrasting Learning Experience) or of your employer;
- Don't share your social media details with the children or families you meet through your practice learning settings and do not interact with them on social media;
- Don't use social media to voice opinions about peers, lecturers, practice or contrasting learning experience providers, children and families within a caseload or any professional with whom you may be working;
- Don't bully, harass or verbally abuse others through racist, sexist, homophobic or other offensive behaviour;
- Don't seek to speak on behalf of Frontline, or on behalf of those providing your practice learning experience placement (including your Contrasting Learning Experience), or on behalf of your local authority employer (unless requested by them to do so).