

Supported Study and Fitness to Study Policy

Policy owner	Chief Social Worker
Policy version number	2025.01
Date	1 July 2025
Next review date	June 2026
Applicable to	All participants

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Section 1: Overview

1.1 Purpose and Scope

- 1.1.1. This policy explains how concerns regarding health, wellbeing, or behaviour are addressed and dealt with by Frontline. Frontline is committed to supporting participants and recognises the importance of health and wellbeing to their academic progress and wider experience. Frontline and Lancaster University have a responsibility to support participants to feel and function well to maximise their potential.
- 1.1.2. The aim of the Supported Study and Fitness to Study policy is to enable participants to successfully engage with and complete their studies in a way that does not significantly compromise the health and wellbeing of themselves or others. Consideration of fitness to study is not a disciplinary process. It is not intended to punish breaches of rules, but rather to support participants in difficulty.
- 1.1.3. In year 1, engagement with studies covers both the academic and practice elements of the programme.
- 1.1.4. After qualifying as social workers, participants (depending on their cohort and choices) may be expected to engage with further academic provision (such as the dissertation module) as well as remaining in employment as social workers with Frontline-partnered local authorities. During this period, this policy will apply where there are concerns about the participant's engagement with the academic provision. Any concerns and conclusions will be shared with the local authority employer so that they can consider what support might be necessary in the employment context.
- 1.1.5. This policy should only be used where participants require support or intervention beyond the remit of standard procedures and support (e.g. standard participant wellbeing support, reasonable adjustments, academic support, etc.).

1.2 Definitions and expectations

- 1.2.1. 'Fitness' refers to health and also to suitability, including capability, capacity and behaviour.
- 1.2.2. A participant would typically be expected to:
 - be able to function independently in the academic environment;
 - not exhibit any mental or physical health needs that unreasonably disrupt the learning or work of other participants or staff;
 - be able to concentrate for significant periods of time;
 - be able to undertake private and independent study;



- be able to engage with other participants and staff in joint activities if required as part of their programme of study;
- be able to receive and respond appropriately to critical appraisal of their work;
- be self-aware, able to maintain their own safety and seek support from appropriate services when required;
- be able to do all of the above and to follow policies and procedures, with reasonable adjustments where appropriate.

Failure to satisfy one or more of the above criteria should not be understood as meaning that a participant is not fit to study, but may lead to consideration of the need to follow the Supported Study and Fitness to Study procedures.

1.2.3. Participants are deemed not fit to study when:

- a) there is sufficient evidence from clinical and non-clinical sources to make an assessment that continuation is detrimental to the participant's health and/or poses a risk to other participants, staff or to members of the public;
- b) reasonable adjustments and support offered are shown to be not sufficient to enable independent engagement;
- c) the participant is unable or chooses not to engage with reasonable adjustments and support offered;
- d) the participant is unable to maintain their own safety and does not, or is not able to, seek support from appropriate sources when required;
- e) the participant's presentation is disruptive in a way that impacts significantly on the study/work/safety of other participants, staff or members of the public.

1.3 Responsibilities

1.3.1 The Chief Social Worker is accountable for the effective implementation of this policy.

1.3.2 The Participant Admission and Support Manager (or nominee) is responsible for:

- effective implementation of the policy;
- chairing fitness to study panels;
- consulting with Lancaster University where an outcome is exclusion of a participant currently registered as a student of the university.

1.3.3 The role of the Head of Delivery is:

- the management of cases;
- conducting or initiating an investigation or activity to establish the facts of cases;
- to determine whether to pursue cases and if so to which stage;
- seeking appropriate support and advice on procedural and policy matters.



Section 2: Policy and procedures

2.1 General principles

- 2.1.1 Frontline aims to foster independence, self-awareness, and personal responsibility among all participants. It is also important that participants take an active part in the process and take suitable action to manage their own health and wellbeing in order to fulfil their academic potential. Frontline is committed to a process of participant involvement in decision making about fitness to study. However, it can insist on outcomes even when the participant does not agree.
- 2.1.2 Frontline will consider the Supported Study and Fitness to Study policy as an alternative to other ways of managing problematic behaviour, academic conduct, and progress if the concerns:
- seem likely to be caused by mental or physical ill health or disability; and
 - could affect the wellbeing, health and/or safety of the participant and/or other people.
- 2.1.3 Frontline will consider reasonable adjustments that may be required when participants with disabilities are involved in Supported Study and Fitness to Study procedures.
- 2.1.4 Where there are sufficient concerns relating to their health, a participant will be asked to undertake an occupational health assessment. Its purpose is to advise Frontline on the fitness of the participant to take part in the fitness to study process and to advise Frontline of any adjustments that may be required to the fitness to study process as a consequence of the participant's health.
- 2.1.5 The policy has two stages: each represents the degree of the concern or the seriousness of the situation (or both). The procedure can be entered at either stage.
- 1) Supported Study: where serious concerns have been raised about whether a participant is 'fit to study' but the participant may benefit from a supported study agreement to enable them to continue with their studies;
 - 2) Fitness to Study: where very serious concerns have been raised about whether a participant is 'fit to study' and supported study is not considered sufficient to mitigate the risk to the participant's health and wellbeing or risk to the health and wellbeing of others.
- 2.1.6 Frontline can instead refer matters under the Fitness to Practise policy if the incident/issues contravene the fitness to practise thresholds, provisions, and requirements of the programme.
- 2.1.7 Information relevant to Supported Study and Fitness to Study procedures will be kept confidential, unless there is a risk to the participant, other participants, staff members, children and families or the general public. All processes followed will meet the requirements for handling sensitive personal data, in line with UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Process



records, including risk assessments and minutes from meetings will be stored confidentially and managed in line with data retention schedules. An exception to this is where information is shared which suggests that a participant has a previously undisclosed disability or change to a disability. Such information will be shared by the Frontline staff receiving it with the Lancaster University Disability and Inclusive Practice Service as appropriate, so that reasonable adjustments and support can be offered or reviewed.

2.2 Management of risk

- 2.2.1 Frontline has a responsibility to manage the risks faced by its staff, its participants, and the children and families with whom they work, and to fulfil its duty of care to staff and participants as well as manage any risk to its reputation. Frontline does this through a process of risk assessment. The normal expectation would be that risk assessment is required in situations where:
- there is a risk of harm to self or others;
 - there are safeguarding issues involved;
 - there is a serious risk to Frontline's legal or financial position, reputational risk or other aspects of Frontline's work;
 - the Police, NHS or other external authorities are involved.
- 2.2.2 Risk assessments will be carried out as part of the Supported Study and Fitness to Study Process, and as a consequence of the risk assessment, precautionary actions may be implemented to reduce the levels of risk. Risk assessments will remain confidential to the Supported Study and/or Fitness to Study Panel.
- 2.2.3 If a participant poses an immediate risk to themselves or others then immediate action should be taken and emergency services should be contacted where necessary. If a participant's behaviour appears to pose a risk to life, staff and participants are advised to call an ambulance. Once the immediate risk has been removed the participant should, as appropriate, be considered under the sections of this Policy.

2.3 Stage 1: Supported study

- 2.3.1 Frontline will initiate supported study procedures when it is perceived that standard procedures (e.g., reasonable adjustments and academic support) are insufficient and/or when a participant is not engaging with the interventions offered by Frontline, local authorities, Lancaster University, or other external services.



- 2.3.2 Support needs can be raised by any source, including Frontline staff, local authority and children's trust employees, participants and/or members of the public.
- 2.3.3 Where such support needs are raised, it is the responsibility of the Frontline staff member with whom they are raised to inform the participant's Practice Tutor and/or Principal Practice Tutor.
- 2.3.4 If required in cases involving participants registered as students of Lancaster University, and in particular where issues appear to require specialist expertise, Frontline may seek advice from Lancaster University's Student Wellbeing Services, normally via first contacting Lancaster's Director of Studies for the Frontline Partnership, who will liaise with Lancaster's Student Wellbeing Services.
- 2.3.5 If required in cases involving participants registered as students of Lancaster University, Frontline should consider consulting with Lancaster University's Disability and Inclusive Practice Service and review any adjustments already in place in order to ensure reasonable adjustments are considered.
- 2.3.6 If the Head of Delivery or Principal Practice Tutor deems the issues to be of appropriate concern, they will invite the participant to a supported study meeting. The invitation will be provided in writing at least 3 working days before the meeting is due to be held.
- 2.3.7 Participants attending such a meeting will be sent a copy of the policy and may be accompanied by a member of their family, a friend, a Students' Union representative (for those registered as current students of Lancaster University) or Union representative.
- 2.3.8 Where the participant is to be accompanied by a legally qualified representative, the participant must inform Frontline 2 working days prior to the meeting. Frontline reserves the right to have their own legal representative at the meeting.
- 2.3.9 Prior to the meeting information will be gathered relating to the participant and the risks, to them and to others, which exist as a result of the concerns raised. It may be appropriate to ask Frontline staff members and/or the Local Authority/children's trust for further information about the behaviour or progress of the participant. It may also be deemed appropriate to approach medical professionals with whom the participant has had prior contact, such as a counsellor/mental health adviser, GP or psychiatrist. Frontline must have consent from the participant in order to contact such professionals unless there is a risk to the participant, children and families, other participants, staff members, or the general public.
- 2.3.10 The meeting will be held by the Head of Delivery (or nominated representative). In attendance is the participant's Practice Tutor (who will minute the actions) and CSW. Other relevant staff members, including but not limited to Frontline's Disability Selection Advisor and Suitability Advisor, may be invited, where it is deemed appropriate.



- 2.3.11 The participant will be expected to answer questions about fitness to study issues. Any representative present is there to support the participant and will be able to address the meeting and/or represent the participant.
- 2.3.12 The meeting will identify the issues and challenges causing concern; consider steps that have already been taken; assess the risks which remain, and whether/how they can be mitigated; and determine next steps, including how to support the participant to engage with their studies and effectively manage their health, wellbeing and behaviour. Next steps may include:
- No further action;
 - Support and/or reasonable adjustments agreed between the participant, Frontline, the local authority and/or support services, with clear identification of roles, responsibilities and boundaries for the participant and staff involved;
 - A period of monitoring to give the participant time to evidence improvement. In this outcome an action plan will be agreed and signed by the member of Frontline holding the meeting and the participant, which will include an agreement on appropriate support to be provided and/or appropriate behaviour to be expected. The participant will be advised that normally the consequence of not adhering to the agreement will be a referral to stage 2 of this policy (Fitness to Study);
 - The participant is referred to stage 2 of this policy (Fitness to Study);
 - The participant intercalates from the programme (see the intercalation policy);
 - The participant is required to undergo an updated Occupational health assessment.
 - Any other actions that are determined to be appropriate, given the risks identified.
- 2.3.13 Following the meeting the participant and other attendees will be provided with the outcome in writing, normally within 3 working days of the meeting. If further actions have been agreed, these will be circulated in a Supported Study Agreement. A copy will be shared with academic.support@thefrontline.org.uk so that this can be stored on the participant's record.
- 2.3.14 The Practice Tutor will consider whether the Supported Study Agreement needs to be shared with any other staff or services which may be relevant to its implementation and will inform the participant prior to sharing.
- 2.3.15 The Practice Tutor will oversee the progress of the Supported Study Agreement and will meet with the participant at intervals agreed as laid out in the document to monitor how effectively the support plan is working for the participant.
- 2.3.16 Where actions have been agreed, the Head of Delivery (or nominated representative) should arrange for a review meeting to take place no later than three months after the initial Support Study meeting.
- 2.3.17 The Supported Study review meeting should:
- review how the participant has been since the previous meeting;
 - review whether actions in the Supported Study Agreement have been taken and completed;
 - review and update the risk assessment;



- describe and explore any further concerns;
- consider new or ongoing relevant mitigating evidence;
- explore further or ongoing support or adjustments that may be needed;
- determine whether further action is needed.

The Supported Study review meeting may conclude:

- That the concerns have been resolved, and no further action will be needed;
- That the concerns remain or have changed in nature or severity, but it remains appropriate for them to be addressed via an amended Supported Study Agreement;
- That concerns remain or have changed in nature or severity, and the participant now wishes to intercalate;
- That serious concerns remain and it is appropriate to move to Stage 2 (Fitness to Study).

2.3.18 If the participant does not attend either the initial or the review meeting, the matter can be progressed in their absence and may reach any of the conclusions above. The participant will be informed that if they do not take the opportunity to meet to discuss concerns about their health and wellbeing or do not give supporting evidence of underlying issues, then Frontline may consider that reason to move to Stage 2 (Fitness to Study), or to refer the matter to be reviewed under an alternative policy as necessary, for example, Fitness to Practise Policy and/or Participant Discipline Policy.

2.3.19 If the outcome of either the initial or the review meeting is that the participant is to intercalate, the relevant procedure must be followed (see intercalation policy). This will include the requirement of the participant to adhere to any agreed conditions of return.

2.4 Stage 2: Fitness to Study

2.4.1 Stage 2 Fitness to Study procedures are used where very serious concerns have been raised about whether a participant is 'fit to study' (as defined in this policy) and supported study is not, or has not been, sufficient to mitigate the risk to the participant's health and wellbeing or risk to the health and wellbeing of others.

2.4.2 Support needs can be raised by any source, including Frontline staff, local authority and children's trust employees, participants and/or members of the public.

2.4.3 Where such support needs are raised, it is the responsibility of the Frontline staff member with whom they are raised to inform the participant's Practice Tutor and/or Principal Practice Tutor.

2.4.4 Where there are concerns that a participant who is currently registered with Lancaster University presents a significant threat of harm to themselves or others, the Head of Delivery should consult with Lancaster University's Student Wellbeing Services, normally via first contacting Lancaster's Director of Studies for the Frontline Partnership, who will liaise with Lancaster's Student Wellbeing Services.



- 2.4.5 If required in cases involving participants registered as students of Lancaster University, Frontline should consult with Lancaster University's Disability and Inclusive Practice Service and review any adjustments already in place in order to ensure reasonable adjustments are considered.
- 2.4.6 This stage of the process will usually follow on from stage 1 (Supported Study). However, Frontline can require a participant to engage with stage 2 (Fitness to Study) without having been through the previous stages, particularly where the health and wellbeing of the participant themselves, children and families, staff, or other participants is considered to be at significant risk.
- 2.4.7 The Head of Delivery (or nominated representative) will draw the case to the attention of the Admissions and Support Manager (or nominated representative). There will be an initial consideration, if necessary with professional input, of the risks to the participant and to others, and a decision will be made as to whether it is in the best interests of the participant or those around them to temporarily suspend the participant from the programme. Should this be deemed necessary, the participant will be temporarily suspended for a period of up to four weeks, pending appropriate investigation and/or a stage 2 Fitness to Study panel.
- 2.4.8 During a period of temporary suspension, the participant retains access to all available participant wellbeing support and will be signposted to this at the point of suspension. Their status as a participant, and as a student for those currently registered with Lancaster University, will not be affected by the temporary suspension. Attendance at teaching days (online or in person) would not usually be expected, though an exception may be made where the Head of Delivery deems it to be safe, advisable, and in the best interests of the participant, and of other participants and staff. The relevant personnel will be informed of the duration, but not the reasons, for the suspension.
- 2.4.9 Where participants in year 1 are suspended pending the outcome of fitness to study procedures, the duration of the suspension will often 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.
- 2.4.10 The Admissions and Support manager (or nominated representative) will invite the participant to a stage 2 Fitness to Study panel in writing. The participant should be given as much notice of the panel as possible and usually no less than five working days. Where circumstances require especial urgency, panels may be held with less notice, but in no case will this be less than 24 hours. The panel will normally be held online (e.g. via Microsoft Teams).
- 2.4.11 There may be occasions when it is not appropriate for the participant to attend the panel (e.g. if they are currently in hospital). In such cases the participant should be given the opportunity to



make written submissions or be able to send a representative in their place. If a representative is attending in place of the participant, the panel requires at least one working day's notice. If it will be a legal representative, at least five working day's notice is required.

- 2.4.12 The participant will be asked to provide any documentation they wish to be considered at the Fitness to Study panel two working days in advance where this is possible. Where only short notice is given, the documentation may be presented at the panel meeting.
- 2.4.13 Participants attending a Fitness to Study panel may be accompanied by a family member, a friend, a Students' Union representative (if currently registered as a student of Lancaster University) or Union representative.
- 2.4.14 The participant will be expected to answer questions about fitness to study issues. Any representative present is there to support the participant and will be able to address the panel and/or represent the participant.
- 2.4.15 Where the participant is to be accompanied by a legally qualified representative, the participant must inform Frontline prior to the hearing at least five working days in advance, provided that they have been given at least this much notice of the hearing. Where hearings have, for reasons of urgency, been scheduled with less notice, participants must inform Frontline of the attendance of legally qualified representatives immediately; Frontline reserves the right to have their own legal representative at the hearing, and to refuse the attendance of the participant's representative if this is not possible ahead of the hearing.
- 2.4.16 The stage 2 Fitness to Study panel will consist of a panel chaired by the Admissions & Support Manager (or nominated representative) and will also consist of two senior members of staff from Frontline, usually a Head of Delivery and a Principal Practice Tutor, or their nominated representative(s). Careful consideration should be given to the membership of the panel depending on the nature of the issues to be discussed. Other relevant staff members may be invited where it is deemed appropriate.
- 2.4.17 Prior to the meeting the panel may hold a case conference with relevant parties to gather information about the participant, the concerns and the earlier stages of the process. This case conference might include the Practice Tutor and/ or Principal Practice Tutor, the CSW or other relevant member of local authority staff, and/or support services and medical professionals involved with the participant. It is not expected that the participant would be invited to this case conference. The purpose of the case conference is to establish facts and assess the level of risk to the participant and to others. No decision in relation to the participant's status on the programme will be made. Notes of the meeting will be made and provided to the participant for information.



- 2.4.18 The agenda for the Stage 2 Fitness to Study panel will be determined by the panel chair prior to the hearing and communicated to all parties. The panel chair will also determine if any persons will be called to present evidence or medical opinion.
- 2.4.19 The stage 2 Fitness to Study panel will determine the outcome based on the evidence available to them and the advice received. Minutes will be taken and distributed to all parties following the meeting.
- 2.4.20 The outcomes the panel can determine include, but are not limited to:
- A period of monitoring to give the participant time to evidence improvement, which may include review meetings. In this outcome Fitness to Study action plan will be agreed with the participant which will be signed by both the chair and the participant, and may include an agreement on appropriate support to be provided or appropriate behaviour to be expected. In this case, the participant will be advised of the consequences of failing to comply with the action plan;
 - That the participant is required to intercalate (noting that return to study will be based on the participant being able to meet any conditions set out, including demonstrating suitable fitness to return, see intercalation policy);
 - In cases where there are concerns with the health and safety of the participant, Frontline makes contact with the participant's registered next of kin (wherever possible this would be done with the full consent of the participant but there may be cases where contact is made without consent);
 - The matter is referred to the Fitness to Practise policy;
 - The panel recommends that the participant be permanently excluded from the programme; or
 - Any other action considered to be appropriate and reasonable.
- 2.4.21 If, without good cause, the participant does not engage with the Stage 2 proceedings, including attending the meeting or sending a representative, and/or providing a written submission and/or evidence, the panel will proceed to hear and determine an action plan in the participant's absence.
- 2.4.22 Following the panel, the participant will be notified of the outcome via phone call within one working day, and in writing normally within 5 working days, including full articulation of their action plan where appropriate. A copy will be shared with academic.support@thefrontline.org.uk so that this can be stored on the participant's record. For those registered as students of Lancaster University, this will also be shared with the university in the instance of exclusion.
- 2.4.23 Where the Fitness to Study panel outcome is a recommendation of exclusion from the programme, in the case of participants who are registered as students of Lancaster University, this recommendation requires consultation with Lancaster University's Student Wellbeing



Services, normally via first contacting Lancaster University's Director of Studies for the Frontline Partnership. Following this consultation, or immediately following the panel in the case of participants not currently registered with Lancaster University, the Chief Social Worker will receive the recommendation and will determine within a further three working days whether it should be implemented with immediate effect or whether the panel should be asked to reconvene to consider any alternative outcome.

2.5 Appeals

2.5.1 If a participant is not satisfied with the outcome of either Stage 2 or Stage 3 (Fitness to Study), they can appeal on the following grounds:

- That the evidence was not considered properly;
- That there is evidence of a material procedural irregularity;
- That there is evidence that the judgement did not meet natural justice; or
- That relevant new material has emerged which was not, for good reason, previously available.

2.5.2 An intention to request a review by the participant must be submitted in writing to Frontline's Registry team at academic.support@thefrontline.org.uk within 10 working days of the receipt of the outcome. A timeframe for production of evidence will then be agreed between Frontline and the participant.

2.5.3 If valid procedural grounds have been determined, then the Programmes Operations Director (or nominated representative) will consider the appeal. The Programmes Operations Director will consult with the Chief Social Worker and the relevant Head of Delivery.

2.5.4 The decision of the Programmes Operations Director (or nominated representative) will consist of one of the following decisions:

- The confirmation of the original decision(s); or
- The referral back to an earlier level of the process (if the process has not been followed and/or if new evidence is made available). In this case the Programmes Operations Director may request that a new panel is convened, or that the original panel be reconvened where possible.

2.5.5 The Programmes Operations Director will normally inform the participant of their decision in writing within five working days of the appeal evidence being received. The suspension of the participant from the programme remains in place whilst the appeal is being considered.

2.5.6 The notification of the decision of the Programmes Operations Director will include a Completion of Procedures letter to allow the participant access to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. Participants who are registered as students of Lancaster University and who appeal on the basis of permanent exclusion will have a right of review of the decision of the Programme Operations



Director by Lancaster University before they access the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. For these participants their Completion of Procedures letter from Frontline will include details of how to request a such a review.

- 2.5.7 Where it is determined that the outcome of an appeal may have significant consequences for others, appropriate information may be shared.
- 2.5.8 A record of the outcome will be held by Academic Registry and will be checked in the event of further incidences for no longer than the end of the participant's participation in the programme plus six years.

2.6 Return to Study

- 2.6.1 Where a participant has been temporarily suspended pending a Stage 2 (Fitness to Study) hearing, and the panel is recommending an outcome which allows them to return to study, they will also set out what, if any, evidence is required from the participant to demonstrate their fitness to return, including the review and updating of any risk assessment that might be in place. This may also include an occupational health assessment, or assessment by another relevant health professional. The participant will be required to give their consent for the report of this assessment to be shared with the panel and other relevant staff identified by the panel.
- 2.6.2 Where a participant has intercalated following Stage 1 (Supported Study) or Stage 2 (Fitness to Study), conditions of return will be set out as per the intercalation policy. These may include specific conditions recommended by the person co-ordinating the Supported Study stage or by the Fitness to Study panel where applicable which will include what, if any, evidence is required from the participant to demonstrate their fitness to return, including the review and updating of any risk assessment that might be in place. This may also include an occupational health assessment, or assessment by another relevant health professional. The participant will be required to give their consent for the report of this assessment to be shared with the panel and other relevant staff identified by the panel.
- 2.6.3 On the participant's return, consideration will be given by the Return to Study meeting/panel as to whether arrangements to support them and prevent a reoccurrence of the original difficulties should be put in place from the outset. This may take the form of a Supported Study Agreement.

Section 3: [Frontline policies](#) and documents

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



- Fitness to Practise Policy
- Participant Discipline Policy
- Intercalation Policy
- Suitability for professional training
- Participant's practice learning agreement
- SWE Professional Standards