

Fitness to Study Policy

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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.
- 1.1.2 Fitness to Study is understood as a participant's ability and suitability to engage with 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 the 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 In Year 2 engagement with studies covers the academic element of the programme only. However, it is Frontline's responsibility to inform the participant's local authority employer if there are Fitness to Study issues raised.

1.2 Responsibilities

- 1.2.1 The chief social worker is accountable for the effective implementation of the policy.
- 1.2.2 The participant suitability manager (or nominee) is responsible for:
 - effective implementation of the policy
 - chairing fitness to study panels.
- 1.2.3 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 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.

- 2.1.2 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.
- 2.1.3 This policy is mainly intended to support participants. Staff can use this policy when a participant's health, wellbeing and behaviour are harming their ability to progress academically and/or to meet the programme requirements.
- 2.1.4 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 concur.
- 2.1.5 Frontline will consider the 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;
 - could affect the wellbeing, health and/or safety of the participant or other people.
- 2.1.6 The policy has three stages, each represents the degree of the concern or the seriousness of the situation (or both). The procedure can be entered at any stage. However, in most cases stages 1 and 2 should normally be used before escalation to stage 3.
- 2.1.7 Frontline can refer matters under the Fitness to Practise policy if the incident/issues contravene the fitness to practise thresholds, provisions, and requirements of the programme.
- 2.1.8 Information relevant to 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.

2.2 Participants with disabilities

- 2.2.1 Frontline will consider adjustments participants involved in Fitness to Study procedures may require.
- 2.2.2 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.



2.3 Stage 1: Initial or emerging concerns

- 2.3.1 Stage 1 is used where there are initial or emerging concerns about a participant's health, wellbeing, or behaviour.
- 2.3.2 Fitness to study concerns can be raised by Frontline staff, local authority and children's trust employees, participants and/or members of the public.
- 2.3.3 Where such concerns are raised, it is the responsibility of the Frontline staff member with whom they are raised to inform the participant's Practice Tutor.
- 2.3.4 It is the participant's Practice Tutor's responsibility to determine an appropriate course of action, which can include: no further action required; the provision of support for the participant; escalation to stage 2 where there are continuing or serious concerns; escalation to one of Frontline's other polices (e.g. Fitness to Practise).
- 2.3.5 Where it is determined that the participant requires support, this will normally be the responsibility of the Practice Tutor. If the participant would be more comfortable talking to or having support provided by another staff member (e.g. someone of another gender) this will normally be facilitated.
- 2.3.6 The participant will be invited to an informal meeting to discuss the issue. Before the meeting the staff member should establish the exact nature of the concern(s) and gather any relevant information, such as attendance records or evidence of what action has been taken already.
- 2.3.7 Other members of staff may attend the meeting if this is appropriate and the participant may bring a friend or another person (such as a representative of the Student's Union) for support to the meeting.
- 2.3.8 Frontline should consider consulting with Frontline's Disability Selection Advisor and Lancaster University's Disability Support Service in order to ensure reasonable adjustments are considered.
- 2.3.9 If required, and in particular where issues appear to require specialist expertise, Frontline can obtain advice on approaches to the issues from Lancaster'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.
- 2.3.10 The participant will be given specific information about the nature of the concerns raised, including factual information, such as times and dates of incidents, specific behaviour that has been witnessed, attendance records and the concerns of others.
- 2.3.11 The staff member should allow the participant to explain their situation and should listen to what the participant has to say in response to the concerns. The participant should be encouraged to



access the available participant wellbeing support as detailed on the programme Moodle pages and also to contact their GP where health and wellbeing issues are specifically mentioned. Any discussion and actions should be documented by the staff member and stored on the participant's record.

2.3.12 The staff member should write a meeting report that includes any agreed actions. A copy should normally be sent to the participant within 5 working days of the meeting. A copy will be shared with academic.support@thefrontline.org.uk so that this can be stored on the participant's record.

2.3.13 The staff member should normally arrange a review meeting, at most three months after the stage 1 meeting. This meeting should:

- review how the participant has been since the first meeting;
- describe and explore any further concerns;
- explore any further and ongoing support needed;
- review progress on the agreed actions;
- determine whether or not further action is needed. If the concern has been resolved, no further action may be needed. If concerns continue or have increased, the meeting should consider progression to stage 2.

2.3.14 It is hoped that most matters can be resolved at this stage without the need to move onto further stages. However, where a participant is unable or refuses to engage with stage 1 of the process, or where continuing or serious concerns remain following the meeting, it may be appropriate to move to more formal action under another stage, normally stage 2.

2.4 Stage 2: Continuing or serious concerns

2.4.1 Stage 2 is used where interventions at stage 1 do not resolve the issue(s) and/or additional or emerging issues arise which appears to seriously affect the participants' performance and/or wellbeing.

2.4.2 As with Stage 1, emphasis will be placed on support to help the participant with their difficulties.

2.4.3 Stage 2 is normally invoked by the practice tutor referring the issue(s) to the head of delivery or principal practice tutor (PPT).

2.4.4 The head of delivery or principal practice tutor 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.



- 2.4.5 Frontline should contact its Disability Selection Advisor and Lancaster University's Disability Support Service regarding their involvement where appropriate and to consult on any further support required.
- 2.4.6 If the head of delivery or PPT deems the issues to be of appropriate concern they will invite the participant to a meeting. The invitation will be provided in writing at least 3 working days before the meeting is due to be held.
- 2.4.7 Participants attending such a meeting will be sent a copy of the policy and may be accompanied by another member of the practice learning environment, a friend, a Students' Union representative or Union representative.
- 2.4.8 Prior to the meeting information will be gathered relating to the participant, including any documents gathered under stage 1 of this policy. 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, other participants, staff members, children and families or the general public.
- 2.4.9 The meeting will be held by the head of delivery (or nominated representative) and other relevant staff members may be invited, where it is deemed appropriate.
- 2.4.10 Participants attending a Stage 2 meeting may be accompanied by another member of the practice learning environment, a friend, a Students' Union representative or Union representative.
- 2.4.11 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.
- 2.4.12 Where the participant is to be accompanied by a legally qualified representative, the participant must inform Frontline prior to the meeting. Frontline reserves the right to have their own legal representative at the meeting.
- 2.4.13 The meeting will discuss the concerns raised about the participant who will be afforded the opportunity to produce any relevant evidence. What (if any) further actions are required will then be determined, which may include:
- No further action;
 - Support and/or reasonable adjustments are agreed between the participant, the Region, the Local Authority and/or support services;
 - 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 3 of the policy;

- The participant is referred to stage 3 of the policy;
- The participant intercalates from the programme (see the intercalation policy);
- Any other actions that are determined to be appropriate to the concerns.

2.4.14 Following the meeting the participant will be provided with the outcome in writing, normally within 5 working days of the meeting. This will include full articulation of any actions to be taken and who is responsible for monitoring the processes. A copy will be shared with academic.support@thefrontline.org.uk so that this can be stored on the participant's record.

2.4.15 Where actions have been agreed, the head of delivery (or nominated representative) should arrange for a review meeting to take place not later than three months after the stage 2 meeting.

2.4.16 The stage 2 review meeting should:

- review how the participant has been since the previous meeting;
- review whether agreed actions have been taken and completed;
- 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 a further action plan is needed. If the concerns have been resolved, no further action will be needed. If the concerns remain or have changed in nature or severity, a further action plan may be put into place or a stage 3 meeting may be required.

2.4.17 If the participant does not attend the stage 2 meeting or the stage 2 review meeting the matter can be progressed in their absence and may conclude in the following ways:

- the head of delivery (or nominated representative) will inform the participant of the outcome of the meeting, including any actions, expectations, support options and plans, as well as giving where relevant a timetable for completion and a review date;
- the matter will be escalated to a stage 3 panel meeting.

2.4.18 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 refer the matter to be reviewed under an alternative policy as necessary, for example, Fitness to Practise Policy and/or Participant Discipline Policy.

2.4.19 If the outcome of the 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 the intercalation policy's conditions of return.



2.5 Stage 3: Persistent or critical concern

2.5.1 Stage 3 of the Fitness to Study process will be instigated if:

- the interventions at stage 2 have been unsuccessful; and/or
- have resulted in a referral to stage 3; and/or
- there is significant threat of harm to self or others.

2.5.2 Where there are concerns that a participant is a significant threat of harm to themselves or others Frontline staff members should draw these to the attention of the head of delivery and should 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.

2.5.3 This stage of the process will usually follow on from stages 1 and 2. However, Frontline can require a participant to engage with stage 3 without having been through the previous stages, particularly where the health and wellbeing of staff, families which the participant is working with other participants is considered to be at significant risk.

2.5.4 The head of delivery (or nominated representative) will draw the case to the attention of the participant suitability manager (or nominated senior representative). There will be an initial consideration with professional input 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 3 Fitness to Study panel.

2.5.5 During a period of temporary suspension, the participant can access the available participant wellbeing support as detailed on the programme Moodle. Their status as a participant will not be affected by the temporary suspension. The relevant personnel will be informed of the duration, but not the reasons, for the suspension.

2.5.6 The participant suitability manager (or nominated senior representative) will invite the participant to a stage 3 Fitness to Study panel in writing. The participant should be given as much notice of the panel as possible and no less than 24 hours. The panel will normally be held via video conferencing.

2.5.7 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.

2.5.8 The participant will be asked to provide any documentation they wish to be considered at the Fitness to Study panel in advance where this is possible, or where only short notice is given, the



documentation should be presented at the panel meeting.

- 2.5.9 Participants attending a Fitness to Study panel may be accompanied by another member of the practice learning environment, a friend, a Students' Union representative or Union representative.
- 2.5.10 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.
- 2.5.11 Where the participant is to be accompanied by a legally qualified representative, the participant must inform Frontline prior to the hearing. Frontline reserves the right to have their own legal representative at the hearing.
- 2.5.12 The stage 3 panel will consist of a panel chaired by the participant suitability manager (or nominated senior representative) and will also consist of two senior members of the learning practice environment (academic or professional services). 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.
- 2.5.13 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 representatives from the region, other support services or medical professionals involved with the case of the participant concerned. It is not expected that the participant would be invited to this case conference. The case conference is fact finding only, and no decision in relation to the participant will be made. Notes of the meeting will be made and provided to the participant for information.
- 2.5.14 The agenda for the Stage 3 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.
- 2.5.15 The stage 3 Fitness to Study panel will determine the outcome based on the evidence available to them and the advice received.
- 2.5.16 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 an 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 (to be agreed based on relevant medical information, noting that the academic requirements for that participant on their course of



study may affect the conditions of return and based on the participant being able to demonstrate 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; or
- Any other action considered to be appropriate and reasonable.

2.5.17 If, without good cause, the participant does not engage with the Stage 3 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.

2.5.18 Following the panel, the participant will be notified of the outcome in writing, normally within 5 working days, including full articulation of their action plan. A copy will be shared with academic.support@thefrontline.org.uk so that this can be stored on the participant's record.

2.6 Review

2.6.1 If a participant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 or 3 of the Fitness to Study process, they can request a review if they have evidence that:

- there was material administrative error or irregularity in the conduct of the stage in question;
- there was unfair treatment or discrimination in the decision of the meeting (Stage 2) or panel (Stage 3);
- there is substantial new evidence that the meeting (Stage 2) or panel (Stage 3) should consider and which was not, for good reason, previously available.

2.6.2 An intention to request a review by the participant must be submitted in writing to Frontline's Registry team 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.

2.6.3 If valid procedural grounds have been determined, then the Chief Social Worker (or nominated representative) will consider the review.

2.6.4 The decision of the Chief Social Worker (or nominated representative) will be final and 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).

2.7 Return to Study

- 2.7.1 The Fitness to Study panel will determine any requirements to be fulfilled on the return of participants to the programme following a temporary suspension of their studies.
- 2.7.2 Following periods of intercalation, return to study will be managed as per the Intercalation policy.

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