

Attendance and Engagement Policy

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Section 1: Overview

1.1 Purpose and Scope

1.1.1 The Frontline programme prioritises hands-on experience through practice-based learning. Participants benefit from intensive practical and academic training that equips them with the knowledge and skills necessary to become excellent social workers. Absence from any element of the programme can negatively impact participants' ability to pass assessments and practice social work of the highest quality. With high quality social work at the heart of Frontline's mission, we track participant attendance and engagement throughout the programme so that staff can provide early intervention and support to those not meeting the expected threshold. Attendance data will also enable participants to self-monitor their engagement with the course.

1.1.2 This policy applies to all participants across both years of the programme. It covers arrangements for Frontline staff in gathering information and data concerning participant attendance and engagement for the purpose of early intervention to support participants who may be experiencing difficulties. The information is available to staff on Frontline's information system and to participants on the virtual learning environment.

1.1.3 The policy enables Frontline to monitor and support participants to achieve 80% attendance at recall days in Year 1 and Year 2 respectively and for Year 1 participants to complete the required and necessary number of placement days, 206 with a minimum of 200, in order to be able to register with Social Work England.

1.2 Responsibilities

1.2.1 This policy is owned by the Delivery Director, who is responsible for its implementation.

1.2.2 All practice tutors (PTs), consultant social workers (CSWs) and support staff are expected to maintain regional procedures in terms of monitoring attendance.

1.2.3 Frontline is responsible for:

- establishing and communicating clear attendance and/or engagement requirements of the programme to participants;
- monitoring the attendance and engagement of participants and maintaining and storing appropriate records for reference;

- early intervention and support where participant attendance and/or engagement has been identified and potentially progressing them under an alternative Frontline Policy if the concerns continue and/or increase; and
- reporting these attendance concerns to Lancaster University, where necessary.

1.2.4 Participants are responsible for:

- consistently and proactively engaging with all aspects of the programme and meeting attendance and engagement requirements associated with each of their academic and practice units or with the practice activities;
- ensuring that they have a clear understanding of the programme’s contents (e.g. structure, curriculum, academic units) and to actively seek clarity from a relevant member of staff where uncertain;
- advising relevant members of staff of an absence, according to the process described within this policy;
- responding to requests from Frontline teams as requested;
- working with Frontline to ask for advice and guidance with relation to any challenges or difficulties; and
- maintaining up-to-date contact details with Frontline and Lancaster University and checking their Lancaster University email account regularly to keep up to date with information.

Section 2: Policy and procedures

2.1 General principles

2.1.1 In accordance with participants’ professional responsibilities as a training social worker, Frontline expects participants to engage fully with all aspects of the programme.

2.1.2 Participants are required to register, with Lancaster University, at times to be specified and to be fully engaged with their studies for the duration of the programme. In Year 1 Participants are permitted up to 25 days’ holiday as approved by their consultant social worker.

2.1.3 Participants must organise their residential and other arrangements to fulfil the requirements of the programme, in terms of both attendance and engagement. Frontline notifies participants of all timetabled teaching days in advance of their occurrence so that this expectation can be met.

- 2.1.4** We recognise that in rare occurrences, there may be extenuating circumstances which mean that that a participant is unable to attend a timetabled day (e.g. important milestones or an ailment/illness which leads to absence from work). With this in mind, Frontline’s minimum attendance requirement is:
- Placement (year one only): at **least 200 days in practice** are required. Please note that this figure is set by Social Work England (SWE). If not met this will lead to a delay and mean that the participant is unable to qualify to register with SWE or progress to Year 2 of the programme.
 - Teaching days: **at least 80% attendance across each year**. Set ‘teaching days’ include the summer institute (year one only), recall days and Year 2 teaching days.
- 2.1.5** Frontline places particular emphasis on participants attending all days of the summer institute as an utmost priority, as this is where participants learn the core foundations of social work practice and where they form integral working relationships with their fellow cohort. We would not expect a participant to miss more than one or two days of the summer institute at most and this should only be in exceptional circumstances.
- 2.1.6** As adult learners, we expect participants to use their professional judgement to determine whether an extenuating circumstance is admissible based on the parameters set out above, prior to notifying Frontline of an intended absence. We avoid listing examples of valid absences, as these will vary on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.1.7** Participants should monitor the number of absences they have taken and be conscious of this with relation to expectations for their attendance for the remainder of the year.
- 2.1.8** With most teaching elements being inextricable from participants’ practice-based learning during year one of the programme, it is not possible for participants to complete their first year on a part-time basis.
- 2.1.9** Frontline reserves the right to refer matters under the Fitness to Study and/or Fitness to Practise Policy if concerns are raised about a participant’s attendance and engagement.
- 2.1.10** When teaching is missed, participants will be expected to catch up on learning so that they do not fall behind in their studies and practice. Resources for each day will be available through our virtual learning environment and in some instances, participants

may be able to make up a missed teaching day (e.g. attending a missed recall day in another region, subject to space and availability).

2.1.11 Frontline aims to support participants in successfully completing the programme requirements and it is the responsibility of the participant to discuss and raise any concerns or barriers that they may have with a member of Frontline staff. In Year 1 if a participant's attendance levels impact on their ability to complete the required and necessary placement days, as set by Social Work England, Frontline may explore an extension as per 2.4 of this policy, which must be agreed by both Frontline and the Local Authority.

2.1.12 Any participant who is suffering from an infectious illness (e.g. measles, malaria, covid-19) or who is absent because of contact with a person suffering from such illness must immediately send a medical certificate to the Regional Coordinator and before returning must submit to the Regional Coordinator a certificate stating that there is no longer any danger of infection being conveyed to other persons.

2.2 Procedure

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

2.2.2 Participants are advised and may be asked to provide evidence to support their absence where appropriate and necessary.

2.2.3 Following receipt of the notification of absence a review will be conducted to confirm if the absence is authorised or not and following a review of the attendance to date whether any informal or formal actions are required, as stated below.

2.2.4 If upon receipt of notification of a participant's absence it is deemed to be without good cause, Frontline will normally contact the participant directly. In such cases it is expected that the dialogue is constructive and respectful and that programme requirements are considered. It is also expected that the conversation will result in an agreed outcome/actions with relation to the absence and its appropriateness.

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

- **Summer Institute-** During the summer institute the participant should email SI@thefrontline.org.uk so that the appropriate review and discussions can take place.
- **Practice in Year 1-** If a participant wishes to submit a current or intended absence from practice in year one they should contact and inform their CSW. The CSW and participant should discuss the likely duration of the absence and consider the effect this may have on the participant's ability to undertake and complete the programme requirements.
- **Recall Days or Year 2 Teaching Days-** If a participant wants to submit a current or intended absence from the recall days in year 1 or year 2 teaching days they should contact their PT or Dissertation Supervisor and regional coordinator.

2.2.6 Where a participant has not notified Frontline of an absence they will be contacted by a member of the Regional Team, who will ascertain the reason for the absence and follow the best course of action or progress under this policy (based upon the reason).

2.2.7 Participants should discuss concerns they have about attendance and engagement with their practice tutor (year one) or dissertation supervisor (year two) as early as possible.

2.3 Managing absence and engagement concerns

2.3.1 Frontline will make every effort to communicate with participants to highlight concerns about levels of attendance and engagement and to offer support.

2.3.2 Frontline will monitor and support participants to complete the programme requirements, if at any point concerns are raised about a participant's attendance and engagement the Head of Region will review and confirm the next steps, as stated in 2.3.4.

2.3.3 Normally the referral to an alternative Frontline policy is reserved for serious and on-going concerns or when a participant has not adhered to previous course of action/action plans or has not engaged with the process.

2.3.4 If a participant does not notify Frontline of their absence or does not provide a satisfactory explanation for the absence or non-completion of work or there are concerns surrounding the participant's level of attendance and engagement, participants may be subject to the following steps:

- a written warning, stating the course of action that will occur if the situation does not improve sufficiently;
- an informal meeting, normally with the Relationship Development Manager or Practice Tutor/Dissertation Supervisor, which will normally result in an action plan and/or warning being provided to the participant;
- referral of the matter under the Fitness to Study and/or Fitness to Practise Policy

2.3.4 If a participant stops attending all taught and practice-based elements of the programme with no explanation provided, then Frontline reserves the right to discontinue and revoke the bursary (year 1).

2.3.5 In making any of the above decisions, Frontline will consider all the circumstances of the individual alongside the requirements of the programme.

2.4 Practice Learning Experience Extension

2.4.1 If a participant has up to 25 days of cumulative approved absence, the default option will be to make up the days at the end of that same programme year. There are however a number of conditions that must be met prior to any extension being granted:

- The Local Authority must consent to the extension;
- During the extension, the participant must have a stage two practice educator supporting them. This must have been agreed between Frontline and the Local Authority;
- Agreed action plan, by all necessary parties; and
- The Head of Region and Practice Tutor of the participant must have consented to the extension.

2.4.2 Each situation will be considered on a case by case basis, and extensions can normally be up to a period of 30 days but aim to allow the participant to complete the minimum days in placement before the necessary Examination Board. An action plan must be set and agreed as part of the approval process.

2.4.3 Ultimately the decision on the approval and the length of the extension must be agreed between Frontline (the relevant Relationship & Development Manager), the Practice Tutor, and the Local Authority Project Manager. An action plan must be set and agreed by the participant, consultant social worker, practice tutor and the Head of Region as part of the approval process.

2.4.4 If a participant has an extension granted but then has an approved absence period in excess of the agreed extension then they may submit an intercalation request form which will be progressed as per the Intercalation, Transfer and Withdrawal Policy.

2.5 Pregnancy and Parenting

2.5.1 Frontline believes that becoming pregnant or caring for a child should not, in itself, prevent a participant from succeeding on the programme. Frontline is committed to ensuring that no such participant is disadvantaged, whilst ensuring that academic standards are not compromised.

2.5.2 The summer institute is a high-intensity five-week residential programme, where private weekend study and some mandatory evening events are likely.

2.5.3 Frontline is not obliged to provide childcare facilities at the summer institute or recall days, however there are some limited childcare opportunities available at the summer institute through our summer institute provider, Warwick Conferences. Please note that these childcare options are not guaranteed and are at the cost of the participant.

Pregnancy

2.5.4 Participants should confirm any suspected pregnancy with their GP and are encouraged to notify Frontline as soon as possible. Year one participants should notify their CSW and practice tutor, and year two participants should notify their Local Authority employer and their dissertation supervisor/Head of Region.

2.5.5 Frontline will work with the Local Authority and ensure that a risk assessment is carried out for year one participants. This will include any contrasting learning experience placements during the period of pregnancy. Where there are additional or specific health needs Frontline may also, in consultation with the participant, refer them for an occupational health assessment.

2.5.6 Frontline will only share information about a participant's pregnancy on a need to know basis.

2.5.7 Frontline will allow participants time off from the programme to attend medical appointments related to their pregnancy or their partner's pregnancy, provided they meet the attendance requirements outlined in this policy.

Leave

2.5.8 Year 2 participants are local authority employees and should refer to their employer's policies on pregnancy, maternity, paternity, shared parental leave and adoption. They may also want to consider an intercalation of their studies.

2.5.9 Year 1 participants are entitled to the following leave:

- **Participants who have given birth** are advised and expected to take a minimum of two weeks maternity leave from the date of the birth.
- **Additional maternity leave:** participants who are the main carer are entitled and encouraged to take up to 52 weeks from the child's birth.
- **Paternity leave:** participants who are fathers or partners of the mother or primary carer (including same sex relationships) and expect to be responsible for raising the child are entitled to take up to two weeks of paternity leave either at the time of or within three months of the birth. They may also choose to have up to 52 weeks off from the child's birth if they wish to share parental leave with their partner.
- **Adoption leave:** participants about to become parents through adoption are entitled to leave mirroring that of maternity and paternity leave above.

2.5.10 The attendance requirements and procedures as set out in section 2.1 and 2.2 above should be continued to be followed in relation to parental leave. Participants wishing to intercalate their studies due to becoming a parent should refer to the intercalation, transfer and withdrawal policy and procedure.

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:

- Intercalation, Transfer and Withdrawal Policy
- Fitness to Study
- Fitness to Practise
- Suitability for Professional Training
- Exceptional Circumstances Policy
- Complaints
- Practice Learning Experience Agreement (PLEA).