

Inspection Report

Inspection ID	UCLR1_B
Course provider	University of Lancashire
Validating body (if different)	N/A
Course inspected	Best Interests Assessor (SW4125)
Mode of study	Full time
Maximum student cohort	30
Date of inspection	02/12/2025 – 03/12/2025
Inspection team	Kate Springett (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Jane Jones (Lay Inspector) Jodie Thomas (BIA Registrant Inspector)
Inspector recommendation	Approved with conditions
Regulator decision:	Approved with conditions
Date of Regulator decision:	10/03/2026
Add in with link to conditions table	Conditions
Date conditions met and approved:	18/06/2026

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Introduction

1. Social Work England completes inspections as part of our statutory requirement to approve and monitor courses. Inspections form part of our process to make sure that courses meet our education and training approval standards for Best Interests Assessor (BIA) courses. We approve courses against these standards to ensure that students who successfully complete a BIA course can meet the requirements set out in the Mental Capacity Act 2005, Schedule A1 and 1A, the Mental Capacity (Deprivation of Liberty: Standard Authorisations, Assessments and Ordinary Residence) Regulations 2008 and the 6 BIA capabilities as described in Annex 1 to the education and training approval standards for Best Interests Assessor (BIA) courses.
2. During the approval process, we appoint partner inspectors. This will include a registered inspector who will be a qualified BIA, and a lay inspector who is not BIA qualified. These inspectors, along with an officer from the education quality assurance team, undertake activity to review documentary information and evidence, and carry out an inspection. This activity could include observing and asking questions about teaching, observations, facilities and learning resources; asking questions based on the evidence submitted; and meeting with staff, people with lived experience and students. The inspectors then make recommendations to us about whether a course should be approved.
3. The process we undertake is described in our legislation: The Children and Social Work Act 2017, [The Social Workers Regulations 2018 - Social Work England](#) , and our [Education and Training Rules 2019](#).
4. In this document we describe the University of Lancashire as ‘the course provider’ and we describe the Best Interests Assessor (SW4125) as ‘the course’.

Summary of Inspection

5. The University of Lancashire and the Best Interests Assessor (SW4125) course was inspected as part of Social Work England’s reapproval cycle, whereby all course providers with BIA courses will be inspected against the new education and training approval standards for BIA courses.
6. A remote inspection took place from 2nd-3rd December 2025.
7. As part of this process we gathered feedback from key stakeholders through meetings on inspection. This included people with lived experience of social work from

the group 'Comensus' (PWLE), employer partners from Westmorland and Furness Council, and Wirral Council, and BIA students and alumni. Written feedback was also gathered from students' experience in advance of the inspection.

Inspection Findings

8. In this section we set out the inspectors' findings in relation to whether the course meets the education and training approval standards for BIA courses. We describe the inspection team in this section as 'we'.

Standard 1. Admissions	Met or not met.
<p>1.1 Confirm that applicants have:</p> <p>i. the potential to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the 6 BIA capabilities set out in Annex 1 of these standards.</p> <p>ii. the potential to meet the eligibility criteria for the role set out in the relevant legislation governing BIA practice.</p> <p>iii. the capability to use information and communication technology (ICT) methods and techniques to achieve course outcomes.</p>	Met
<p>1.2 Confirm that applicants are and remain fully registered with a relevant regulatory body in line with the relevant regulations.</p>	Met
<p>1.3 Confirm that applicants have, and can demonstrate, suitable prior experience of the practical application of appropriate legislation and policy, specifically including but not limited to mental capacity, mental health and human rights legislation, and demonstrable experience of understanding risk in relation to these.</p>	Met
<p>1.4 Confirm that applicants have a robust level of legal literacy in appropriate legislative and policy areas.</p>	Met
<p>1.5 Ensure that employers, providers of observation opportunities, people with lived experience, and carers are involved in admissions processes.</p>	Met
<p>1.6 Ensure that the admissions processes include assessment of the suitability of applicants, including in relation to their conduct, health and character. This includes appropriate criminal conviction checks.</p>	Met
<p>1.7 Ensure that there are equality, diversity and inclusion policies in relation to applicants and that they are implemented and monitored.</p>	Met
<p>1.8 Ensure that the admissions process gives applicants the information they require to make an informed choice about whether to take up a place. This will include information about the award level and professional qualification, course content, teaching modes, location of study, assessment methods, duration, and observation requirements including the expectations around arranging or securing observation opportunities.</p>	Met

Key observations for standard 1

9. We were satisfied that the course provider had a robust admissions process in place to ensure all successful applicants were suitable for the course.

10. The course provider ensured the applicants were registered and the application process ensured that applicants had the appropriate ICT skills, knowledge, experience, legal literacy, qualifications, and the ability to develop the knowledge and skills to successfully complete the course and practice as a BIA (1.1, 1.3, 1.4).

11. In addition to the above, applicants were advised there was a requirement to notify the university of any changes to their registration status (1.2).

12. In relation to ensuring suitability of applicants, including their conduct, health and character, sponsored applicants must have been supported to apply by their employers, and independent applicants had to provide a professional reference. Additionally, there was a requirement that all applicants had a recent (issued within the past 12 months) DBS check (1.6).

13. In relation to ensuring applicants have suitable prior experience, the application process involved applicants providing examples of their experience of applying legislative frameworks, and how their prior experience contributed to the development of their relevant knowledge and skills (1.3).

14. The admissions process involved a variety of stakeholders undertaking differing roles. Employers and providers of observation opportunities were involved in sponsored candidate applications as they were required to confirm the candidate had the requisite knowledge and experience related to the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (1.3, 1.5).

15. We agreed the application process was strengthened to ensure that all applicants were in a position to have shadowing opportunities.

16. Whilst there was no prior PWLE involvement in the programme at the time of the inspection, we were satisfied that PWLE would be involved in reviewing personal statements from the next intake. This was demonstrated in documented plans and confirmed by PWLE during the inspection (1.5).

17. In relation to Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) we noted there were University wide EDI policies and applicants were given the opportunity to request any reasonable adjustments they may require during the admissions process. The application form included a tick box where the applicant could indicate if they required additional support (1.7).

18. During the inspection examples of reasonable adjustments were provided and students reported feeling supported during the application process (1.7).

19. Students also felt that they were given all information they required to make an informed choice about whether to take up a place on the programme. We agreed that the website covered all the

<p>necessary and relevant information about the course, and they also heard the course lead sent the necessary information to independent applicants (1.8).</p>	
<p>Standard 2. Course governance, management and quality.</p>	<p>Met or not met</p>
<p>2.1 Ensure courses are supported by a management and governance plan that includes the roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability of individuals and governing groups in the delivering, resourcing and managing the quality of the course.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>2.2 Ensure that effective monitoring, evaluation and improvement systems are in place, and that these involve employers, people with relevant lived experience including carers, and students.</p>	<p>Not met</p> <p>See key observations for standard 2 for further information</p>
<p>2.3 Ensure that admissions are aligned to a clear strategy, which includes consideration of: i. wherever appropriate, local and regional capacity for observation opportunities; and ii. the availability of part-time or other flexible course arrangements to widen access wherever possible.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>2.4 Ensure that the person with overall professional responsibility for the course is a relevant qualified professional (social worker, occupational therapist, psychologist or nurse) with appropriate experience of BIA practice.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>2.5 Ensure that there is adequate provision of appropriately qualified and experienced staff.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>2.6 Ensure that educators are supported to maintain their knowledge and understanding in relation to mental capacity, mental health and human rights legislation and policy, including recent developments, and the practical application of this via the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards, including giving support to undertake continuing professional development relevant to their role.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>2.7 Ensure that students have the opportunity to provide feedback about the course and that this feedback is analysed, shared with employers and others involved in commissioning places on the course, and used to inform the management and development of the course.</p>	<p>Met</p>

Key observations for standard 2.

20. We saw evidence which demonstrated the programme was supported by a governance plan and had adequate and relevant staffing (2.1).

21. The three main teaching staff were qualified BIAs with experience, and the programme was led by a qualified BIA who was also registered with Social Work England. We agreed that there was adequate provision and it was clear what the responsibilities of staff were (2.4, 2.5).

22. We agreed that the course staff were supported to maintain their knowledge and understanding in relation to mental capacity, mental health and human rights legislation and policy as scholarly activity was supported and there was protected time for staff to undertake BIA and/or DOLS assessments. We also heard members of the course team were encouraged to maintain their continual professional development, including keeping up to date on case law and attending relevant conferences (2.6).

23. We felt assured the course team were aware of the possibility of fluctuating staff levels and this was reviewed prior to each intake. The course team provided an example of how they ensured the course content remained current. We heard that the course provider recently hired a barrister with current legal knowledge.

24. In relation to stakeholder involvement in monitoring, evaluation and improvement of the programme, we were satisfied feedback was sought from students, employers and PWLE (2.2).

25. There was a teaching partnership agreement which set out how the course was monitored and there was a management and governance plan showing plans for quality assurance and monitoring (2.1).

26. When meeting with PWLE, they assured us that they were going to be involved in the admissions process, however they were not aware of their role going forward in relation to monitoring and evaluation of the course/ programme. The course team informed us that PWLE would be involved in a twice-yearly stakeholder meeting (2.2).

27. We agreed there was an intention to involve PWLE in the monitoring, evaluation and improvement of the programme however as this was not yet finalised, we recommend a condition to ensure involvement of PWLE moving forward (2.2).

28. In relation to student numbers and capacity, it was evidenced that for sponsored applicants, it was the employer's responsibility to ensure there were appropriate observation opportunities. The course provider also made it clear that independent applicants were responsible for arranging their own observation opportunities and this had to be formally agreed at the application stage prior to entry on to the course (2.3).

29. In relation to delivery of the programme, it was delivered over 7 days. Employers reported the length and structure of the course being positive as it felt like there was momentum. We agreed that the course provider had considered capacity and structure/length of the programme.

30. Feedback was sought from students through mid-point evaluations, final module surveys and reflective forums. Students also told us they were informally asked for feedback throughout the programme. The course team were able to provide examples of where they had acted on and made changes because of student feedback (2.7).

31. In relation to sharing feedback with employers, this would be done through a twice-yearly partnership meeting where there would be an agenda item focusing on feedback and development of the programme (2.7).

Standard 3. Observation opportunities.	Met or not met
<p>3.1 Ensure that each student has the opportunity to undertake a minimum of 2 practice observation opportunities which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. enables the student to shadow a BIA or community DoLS assessment. ii. provide practice experience that can be applied to a variety of settings and types of supervisory body. iii. enables the student to observe a suitably qualified and experienced relevant qualified professional who has relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to demonstrate safe and effective practice. iv. enables the student to produce a detailed analysis of relevant practice issues which forms part of the student’s overall assessment. 	Met
<p>3.2 Ensure that the number, duration and range of observation opportunities is appropriate to support the delivery of the course and the achievement of the learning outcomes.</p>	Met
<p>3.3 Maintain clear collaborative arrangements for planning and communication with providers including a thorough and effective system for approving and monitoring all observation opportunities.</p>	Met
<p>Key observations for standard 3.</p> <p>32. We understood that two observations must take place as part of the programme, however one of these was done prior to starting the course.</p>	

33. For sponsored students, it was the employer’s responsibility to provide the observations opportunity and independent applicants were expected to find their own observation opportunities. The course provider did not permit independent applicants if they did not have prearranged observations opportunities. (3.1)

34. There was a requirement that observations had to be contrasting, and this was checked by the course leader via a form the students completed following the shadowing opportunity. (3.1, 3.2)

35. Following introduction of the BIA standards, to ensure suitability of observations the course provider communicated the expectations and responsibilities of employers in relation to the observation opportunities. It was also understood that observation opportunities were quality assured to ensure consistency of student experience. (3.3)

36. Students were required to complete a reflective journal following shadowing which allowed them to consider and reflect on the opportunity, and students reported feeling prepared for BIA practice following completing their observations. (3.2)

Standard 4. Curriculum and assessment	Met or not met
4.1 Ensure that the content, structure and delivery of the training is in accordance with relevant guidance and frameworks and is designed to enable students to demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the requirements of the role as set out in the 6 BIA capabilities set out at Annex 1, as well as a sound understanding of cross-national border issues in relation to practice in Wales, where this is appropriate.	Met
4.2 Ensure that the views of employers, practitioners, people with lived experience of social work and carers are incorporated into the design, ongoing development and review of the curriculum.	Not met See key observations for standard 4 for further information
4.3 Ensure that the course is designed in accordance with equality, diversity and inclusion principles, and, human rights and legislative frameworks.	Met
4.4 Ensure that the course is continually updated as a result of developments in research, legislation, government policy, best practice, and case law.	Met
4.5 Ensure that the integration of policy, legal literacy and practice is central to the course.	Met

4.6 Ensure that the number of hours spent in structured academic learning under the direction of an educator is sufficient to ensure that students meet the required level of competence.	Met
4.7 Provide staff involved in leading and delivering the training with sufficient protected training time to keep their own practice and knowledge up to date in line with statutory and regulatory requirements.	Met
4.8 Ensure that assessments are robust, fair, reliable and valid, and that those who successfully complete the course have developed the knowledge and skills necessary to make robust, independent and well-evidenced assessments in the best interests of the person. This should include regular monitoring and evaluation of assessment standards to ensure that they remain robust and reliable.	Met
4.9 Ensure students are provided with feedback throughout the course to support their ongoing development.	Met
4.10 Ensure that the course is designed to enable students to develop an evidence-informed approach to assessment and evaluation, underpinned by skills, knowledge and an ability to interpret and respond appropriately to legislative and policy change and case law.	Met
4.11 Ensure that the course equips students with knowledge and skills in relation to identifying and anticipating areas of conflict arising from DoLS processes and outcomes, and supporting individuals, families, carers and agencies to understand the checks and balances of the DoLS system, to support a robust, independent and well-evidenced determination in the best interests of the person.	Met
4.12 Clearly specify requirements for student progression and achievement within the course.	Met
4.13 Clearly specify that any equivalent award which may be made will not lead to eligibility to be approved as a BIA.	Met
4.14 Clearly specify a process for the appointment of at least 1 external examiner who must be an appropriately experienced and relevant qualified professional.	Met
Key observations for standard 4.	

37. The module handbook clearly stated that there was no alternative award available, and that students must pass all elements of the course to qualify as a BIA. (4.13)
38. We agreed that overall, the programme enabled students to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to practise as a BIA. (4.1)
39. As part of the evidence submission, the course provider clearly demonstrated how the course content and assessment linked to the BIA capabilities. It was also evidenced the course was designed in accordance with equality, diversity and inclusion principles. There was also documentary evidence demonstrating how human rights and legislative frameworks were embedded in the programme. (4.1, 4.3)
40. We agreed there was an evidence-informed approach to learning and practice, and this was embedded across the module through teaching, directed reading, and access to professional and academic resources. (4.10)
41. It was noted that content also included addressing key complexities within best interests assessments, including disagreements and conflicts; power dynamics and legal issues. (4.11)
42. We felt assured the case law being taught on the course remained up to date and were assured the programme content was reviewed regularly through meetings each semester with the teaching partnership. (4.4)
43. During the inspection, students and employers reported feeling that the teaching on the programme was both evidence-based and practical which equipped students to undertake the role of a BIA. (4.8, 4.10)
44. In relation to EDI, there was an assessment strategy which outlined the process for students who required additional support. We sought examples of reasonable adjustments which the course team provided. The curriculum and teaching content was also reviewed for inclusion of EDI, and we heard about how case law was used within teaching to draw out those EDI principles. (4.3)
45. The assessments on the programme covered theory, decision making, legal frameworks and the autonomous nature of the BIA role. We agreed that these, coupled with the two observations demonstrated the programme ensured the integration of policy, legal literacy and practice. (4.5)
46. The assessment strategy demonstrated that assessments were robust, fair, reliable and valid and we saw evidence of the module descriptors being mapped to the Social Work England BIA standards. We were also assured assessments were internally and externally checked each year to ensure they remained fit for purpose. We also felt it was made clear to students that all elements of assessments must be passed in order to qualify (4.8, 4.12)
47. In relation to stakeholder involvement in the design, ongoing development and review of the curriculum, we felt the course team had a clear idea about how employers, practitioners and PWLE

would be involved, but this was yet to be put in place. We heard there would be a stakeholder meeting twice yearly, and the agenda would include evaluation and review of the programme. (4.2)

48. Despite the explanation provided to us, there was a lack of formal planning in relation to this, and we recommended a condition against standard 4.2.

49. We noted that the course provider had considered the number of hours spent in structured academic learning, and this was adequate based on documentary evidence. (4.6)

50. We also noted there had been an increase in teaching days (from 6 days to 7) so that more support around assignments could be provided, in the form of an assignment workshop, and we agreed this was appropriate. (4.6)

51. As mentioned in standard area 2, scholarly activity was supported and there was protected time for staff to undertake BIA and/or DOLS assessments. When speaking to the course team, we heard about staff having protected time to update their practice and knowledge. (4.7)

52. We agreed that despite the course being short, they felt assured feedback was sufficient. We heard that students were provided with feedback throughout the course and students reported the feedback being to a good standard, including constructive feedback on assignments so they could improve their work. (4.9)

53. We agreed there was a process in place for recruiting an EE (external examiner) and the EE in post was registered with Social Work England. (4.14)

Standard 5. Supporting students.	Met or not met
5.1 Ensure that students have access to resources to support their health and wellbeing including confidential counselling services. The course must also equip students to understand the potential impact of BIA practice on their own emotional and mental wellbeing, and the importance of identifying ways to handle this impact.	Met
5.2 Ensure that students have access to a system of academic and pastoral support for their progression, development and welfare.	Met
5.3 Ensure that there is a thorough and effective process for ensuring the ongoing suitability of students' conduct, character and health.	Met

<p>5.4 Make reasonable adjustments for students with health conditions or impairments to enable them to progress through their course and meet the specialist, capabilities in accordance with relevant legislation.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>5.5 Provide timely information to students about their curriculum, observation requirements, assessments, and implications for their continuing practice, including arrangements for annotation of the register and requirements for periodic refresher training.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>5.6 Ensure that students are able to draw links between the completion of their BIA course and ongoing refresher training, and the ongoing requirements of their professional registration such as continuing professional development.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>5.7 Provide timely and meaningful feedback to students on their progression and performance in assessments.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>5.8 Ensure there is an effective process in place for students to make academic appeals.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>5.9 Ensure that policies and processes, including for whistleblowing, are in place for students to challenge unsafe behaviours and cultures and organisational wrongdoing, and report concerns openly and safely without fear of adverse consequences.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p><u>Key observations for standard 5.</u></p>	

54. The course provider submitted evidence which demonstrated they had a range of support services available to students. These services included student wellbeing service, access to a personal tutor, and confidential counselling services. (5.1)

55. In addition to students having access to resources to support their health and wellbeing, students told us the course helped them understand the potential impact of BIA practice on their own emotional wellbeing, and they felt resilient in relation to this. (5.1)

56. We were assured that there was adequate academic and pastoral support available to students, there was a personal tutor system, and students told us that the course team were approachable. There was evidence of reasonable adjustments being made where necessary and students with adjustments reported feeling well supported and having their needs met. (5.2, 5.4)

57. The application process ensured students had suitable conduct, character and health. To ensure the ongoing suitability of students, the course provider had a process in place whereby there was an agreement with employer partners where there was an obligation to inform the course provider, should there be a change to students' conduct, character or health. (5.3)

58. The student handbook provided an outline of the course content and expectations of students on the programme; the teaching also included information on BIA refresher training and register annotations. We spoke to students who reported being aware of the above information. (5.5)

59. As mentioned in standard area 4, students informed us that feedback was constructive and enabled them to improve. Evidence provided also demonstrated feedback was provided in a timely manner. (5.7)

60. The course provider had a university academic appeals procedure, and students were provided with information on making an appeal in the student handbook and on the virtual learning environment. (5.8)

61. Finally, there was evidence of a whistleblowing policy and process in place and students were informed that they should raise concerns if they observed practice which was unsafe, abusive, discriminatory or exploitive and the course team were supportive of students in relation to whistleblowing. (5.9)

Outcome

62. We recommend that the course be approved with conditions. These will be monitored for completion.

63. The regulator decision maker agreed with this [recommendation](#).

Conditions

64. Conditions for approval are set if there are areas of a course that do not currently meet our standards. Conditions must be met by the course provider within the agreed timescales.

65. Having considered whether approval with conditions or a refusal of approval was an appropriate course of action, we are proposing the following conditions for this course at this time.

	Standard not currently met	Condition	Date for submission of evidence	Link
1	2.2	The course provider must submit evidence to demonstrate they have a formal process for the involvement of PWLE in relation to monitoring, evaluation and improvement of the programme.	10 June 2026	2.2
2	4.2	The course provider must submit evidence to demonstrate that the views of employers, practitioners, people with lived experience of social work and carers are incorporated into the design, ongoing development and review of the curriculum.	10 June 2026	4.2

66. As conditions have been attached to the approval, the University of Lancashire must provide evidence of meeting these conditions as outlined in the report and in the timescales agreed. Failure to do so may result in approval being withdrawn.

Meeting of Conditions

67. If conditions are applied to a course approval, Social Work England completes a conditions review to make sure course providers have complied with the conditions and are meeting all of the BIA standards [insert link to these]

68. Inspectors will undertake the conditions review and make recommendations to Social Work England's decision maker.

69. This section of the report will be completed when the conditions review is completed.

	Standard not met	Condition	Inspector recommendation
1	2.2	The course provider must submit evidence to demonstrate they have a formal process for the involvement of PWLE in relation to monitoring, evaluation and improvement of the programme.	Condition met
2	4.2	The course provider must submit evidence to demonstrate that the views of employers, practitioners, people with lived experience of social work and carers are incorporated into the design, ongoing development and review of the curriculum.	Condition met

Findings

70. This conditions review was undertaken as a result of conditions set during course approval, as outlined in the original inspection report above.

71. With respect to the conditions set against standards 2.2 and 4.2, we required PWLE to be involved in monitoring, evaluating and improving the programme, as well as being involved in the design, ongoing development and review of the curriculum.

72. We have seen evidence PWLE are now involved in; participation in teaching and discussion forums, reviewing curriculum content, reviewing stakeholder feedback, advising on curriculum updates, and ensuring the programme remains responsive to statutory and workforce requirements.

73. PWLE involvement on the course is now set out in the management and governance plan, and evidenced in the BIA steering group agendas and minutes.

74. With respect to the condition set against standard 4.2 we required employer/practitioner involvement into the design, ongoing development and review of the curriculum.

75. The BIA steering group enables the relevant stakeholders to contribute directly to curriculum review and programme development. This is documented in the steering group meeting minutes.

76. The inspectors are recommending that the conditions set against standard 2.2 and 4.2 are met.

Regulator decision

77. Conditions met.