Inspection Report

Inspection ID	ULIR1_B
Course provider	University of Lincoln
Validating body (if different)	N/A
Course inspected	Best Interests Assessor
Mode of study	Part time
Maximum student cohort	60
Date of inspection	19th – 20th January 2026
Inspection team	Joseph Hubbard (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Rebecca Khanna (Lay Inspector) Graeme Currie (BIA registrant Inspector)
Inspector recommendation	Approved with conditions
Regulator decision:	Approved with conditions
Date of Regulator decision:	14th May 2026
Conditions:	Standards 1.5, 2.2, 4.2
Date conditions met and approved:	15th October 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 Lincoln as 'the course provider' and we describe the Best Interests Assessor course as 'the course'.

Summary of Inspection

5. The University of Lincoln's Best Interests Assessor 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 19th – 20th January 2026.

7. As part of this process the inspection team gathered feedback from key stakeholders through meetings on inspection. This included a group of recent alumni from the course and two employer partner representatives.

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.**
1.1 Confirm that applicants have: i. the potential to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the 6 BIA capabilities set out in Annex 1 of these standards. ii. the potential to meet the eligibility criteria for the role set out in the relevant legislation governing BIA practice. iii. the capability to use information and communication technology (ICT) methods and techniques to achieve course outcomes.	Met
1.2 Confirm that applicants are and remain fully registered with a relevant regulatory body in line with the relevant regulations.	Met
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.	Met
1.4 Confirm that applicants have a robust level of legal literacy in appropriate legislative and policy areas.	Met
1.5 Ensure that employers, providers of observation opportunities, people with lived experience, and carers are involved in admissions processes.	Not met *see key observations for standard 1 for further information*
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.	Met
1.7 Ensure that there are equality, diversity and inclusion policies in relation to applicants and that they are implemented and monitored.	Met
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.	Met

Key observations for standard 1 9. Admission to the course is through a course provider application form, which outlines the applicant's qualifications, experience, and a personal statement. Applicants' potential to meet the BIA capabilities, eligibility for the role, and suitability are assessed through review of the application form using a screening tool. ICT competence is confirmed through completion of the online application process, and through self-declaration of ability to effectively use relevant ICT (1.1). 10. Prior relevant experience and appropriate legal literacy are also established through specific aspects of the application form (1.3, 1.4). The application form requires applicants to provide their registration number and regulatory body, which the admissions team checks against the appropriate register to confirm current registration (1.2). 11. Regarding stakeholder involvement in admissions, the course provider's evidence stated that in most cases employers endorse or support applicants who they consider to be suitable for the BIA course. Employer partner representatives confirmed that they select applicants they deem appropriate to apply for the course, but have no further involvement in the admissions process (1.5). 12. While there is an established school-wide group (Together Group) for the engagement of people with lived experience (PWLE), the course provider identified that this is not something currently in use for their BIA course. The inspection team determined that as this standard requires course providers to ensure involvement of stakeholder groups, the evidence provided was not sufficient and a condition was therefore required for this standard (1.5). Full details of conditions can be found in the proposed outcome section. 13. A declaration of suitability form was provided, along with a document outlining the process for assessing suitability of applicants for the course. The application form requires a declaration regarding criminal convictions and all applicants must undergo an enhanced DBS check (1.6). 14. The course provider's mapping narrative provided an overview of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles in place through organisation-wide policies. Anonymised student data was also provided to demonstrate that this is being gathered and monitored. The admissions process document outlined how students who need reasonable adjustments for the admissions process itself can contact the admissions team for support. This was triangulated at inspection with admissions staff and students (1.7). 15. The inspectors were in agreement that applicants are provided with the information they need to make an informed choice about taking up a place on the course (1.8).	

Standard 2. Course governance, management and quality.	**Met or not met**
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.	Met
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.	Not Met *see key observations for standard 2 for further information*
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.	Met
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.	Met
2.5 Ensure that there is adequate provision of appropriately qualified and experienced staff.	Met
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.	Met
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.	Met
Key observations for standard 2	

16. We saw that there is a management and quality assurance structure in the school which monitors the quality and improvement of the BIA course. Key roles and structures were discussed to clarify the relevant lines of accountability and governance groups. It was confirmed that going forwards, the course will have a dedicated subject committee and subject board due to the growing size of the cohorts (2.1). 17. Widening access to the course through flexible arrangements has been taken into account in the decision to run the course online, and to provide course materials digitally for review in addition to live online teaching sessions. While no single strategy document was provided around admissions numbers for the course, it was demonstrated through the mapping narrative and triangulation with employers that the course is necessarily responsive to regional capacity and demand through the commissioning process. Employers must also formally confirm they have capacity to provide the required observations for all student places they commission. 18. For the small number of independent students admitted to the course, they must also confirm at admissions that they are able to secure observations opportunities. We established that when independent students' observation opportunities cannot be arranged during the usual timescale, support is provided and assessment timelines are extended to accommodate this (2.3). 19. We met with stakeholders who provided examples of where their input has previously been used to improve the quality of the course. The subject board will include student input as well as review of external examiner reports and response (2.7). As structures for ensuring employer and PWLE input into the subject board or subject committee are not yet in place, the inspection team agreed that a condition was necessary regarding engagement of these groups in quality assurance (2.2). Full details of conditions can be found in the proposed outcomes section. 20. The programme leader's CV and role descriptor confirmed that the person with overall professional responsibility for the course is a relevant qualified professional with appropriate experience of BIA practice (2.4). Staff CVs confirmed that staff involved in the course are appropriately qualified and experienced, and workloading guidance evidenced how the course provider ensures the staff numbers are sufficient. At inspection, it was confirmed that one further member of staff has been agreed for the next iteration of the course due to the increasing cohort sizes (2.1, 2.5). 21. Educators are supported to maintain the currency of their legal knowledge for the course through partnerships with Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)	

leads, networking with visiting practitioners, and subscription to digital legal update services. Examples were provided of how staff ensure their knowledge is up to date (2.6).	
Standard 3. Observation opportunities.	**Met or not met**
3.1 Ensure that each student has the opportunity to undertake a minimum of 2 practice observation opportunities which: 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
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.	Met
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.	Met
Key observations for standard 3 22. Evidence was provided by the course provider that each student undertakes two practice observations which meet the requirements of the standards. Students are able to undertake one of their observations prior to the course, up to a maximum of 12 months before. It was clear that assessments draw on the students' experience and analysis of their practice observation opportunities. Students cannot progress to exam board without evidencing that both observations have taken place through completion of the observation form. Where a student has not been able to secure a second observation in time, their assessment is deferred to ensure this happens before they complete the course (3.1, 3.2).	

23. The observation form and shadowing report confirm that observations support achievement of the learning outcomes, by outlining the nature of the observed assessment and the credentials of the observed professional (3.1). Guidance around ethical considerations and consent is also included on the observation form, and both the course team and students confirmed at inspection that the importance of ethics is emphasised in the course (3.3).	
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	Met

evaluation of assessment standards to ensure that they remain robust and reliable.	
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 24. Through review of course documentation and discussions with students and course team staff at inspection, it was confirmed that the course content is comprehensively mapped to the BIA capabilities (4.1). 25. As discussed within standard areas 1 and 2, the course provider acknowledged that they are not yet ensuring regular engagement of stakeholders in the course – this includes the ongoing development of the curriculum. Members of the Together Group provided input into the design of assessment tasks, but not review of the curriculum more broadly, and there is no mechanism to ensure their ongoing involvement. Practitioners do have direct involvement in the review of teaching materials, as a number of practitioners teach on the course, one of whom is also an employer partner representative. However, the inspectors did not feel this constituted employer involvement in keeping with the requirements of this standard, as there is no mechanism in place to ensure ongoing involvement of employers in review of the curriculum. A condition has	

therefore been applied to this standard (4.2). Full details of conditions can be found in the proposed outcome section. 26. The course provider evidenced that the course is designed in accordance with principles of EDI and human rights, and how this aligns the course to their EDI strategy. Examples were provided of reasonable adjustments that can be put in place for students where needed (4.3). 27. Annual content review discussions are held to ensure the course remains up to date, and specific examples were provided. Course staff provided examples of how they keep their own practice knowledge up to date. Students and employer partners also confirmed that the course reflects current practice (4.4). The inspectors were also assured that the course content reflects consistent integration of policy, legal literacy, and practice (4.5). 28. We were assured that the number of hours spent in structured academic learning is sufficient to ensure students meet the required competence level (4.6). As discussed within standards 2.6 and 4.4, course staff provided examples of continuing professional development activities they have engaged in and how they maintain the currency of their practice and knowledge (4.7). 29. The assessment approach for the course follows the organisation-wide assessment strategy, which includes both formative and summative tasks. Assessments are moderated internally and through an External Examiner, to ensure assessment quality and fairness. Students confirmed that details of assessments and progression requirements were made clear to them. It was confirmed that no equivalent award is available (4.8, 4.12, 4.13). 30. The course provider provided their feedback and evaluation principles and toolkits regarding assessment feedback, and an EE report which noted some inconsistency in level of detail provided by different markers. The course team outlined how this has been addressed, with all markers now using the same template to ensure consistent feedback format (4.9). 31. The mapping narrative and course content indicated that the course is designed to foster an evidence-informed approach to assessment, and students confirmed on inspection that the course had emphasised the importance of case law and use of evidence (4.10). Review of the course content documentation indicated a broad range of learning topics are covered, including those stipulated by standard 4.11 such as areas of conflict arising from DoLS processes. Students confirmed that the course gave them the confidence to push back where necessary in such situations (4.11).	

32. Documentation was provided to evidence that a process is in place for the appointment of an appropriate external examiner, and the current external examiner was confirmed to be a registered professional with appropriate experience (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
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.	Met
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.	Met
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.	Met

5.7 Provide timely and meaningful feedback to students on their progression and performance in assessments.	Met
5.8 Ensure there is an effective process in place for students to make academic appeals.	Met
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.	Met
Key observations for standard 5 33. The course provider provided links to various webpages which laid out the support provision available for students, including a confidential counselling service. These services undergo annual service reviews to ensure they are effective and accessible (5.1). Academic support is provided through the course team and library services, with reasonable adjustments put in place for students who require them. Students confirmed that course staff are responsive and supportive, including around assessments and extenuating circumstances where necessary (5.2). 34. The suitability of students' conduct, character, and health is ensured at admissions through a declaration of suitability, along with professional registration and DBS checks. The course provider has a fitness to practise process in place to address any presenting concerns that arise during a student's course (5.3). As discussed under standard 4.3, details were provided of how the course provider caters for students who have additional learning needs or require reasonable adjustments. Students confirmed that the process for accessing reasonable adjustments was straightforward and effective (5.4). 35. Comprehensive information on all areas outlined in standard 5.5 is covered within the programme webpages and introductory slides (5.5). Additional documentation was provided to demonstrate that students are made aware of the requirements for ongoing BIA refresher training, alongside the requirements of their existing professional registration (5.6).	

36. As discussed under standard 4.9, the course provider provided their feedback and evaluation principles and toolkits regarding assessment feedback, and confirmed at inspection that all markers use the same template to ensure consistent feedback format (5.7). Policies are in place, as required, for academic appeals and for whistleblowing (5.8, 5.9).	

Outcome

The inspection team recommend that the course be approved with conditions. These will be monitored for completion.

The regulator decision maker agreed with this recommendation.

Conditions

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.

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

	Standard not currently met	Condition	Date for submission of evidence	Link
1	1.5	The course provider will evidence that they have created routes for regular engagement in the admissions process from the following stakeholder groups; i. Employers ii. Providers of observations iii. People with lived experience	14th November 2026	Standard area 1
2	2.2	The course provider will evidence that they have created routes for regular engagement in the evaluation	14th November 2026	Standard area 2

		and improvement of the course from the following stakeholder groups; i. Employers ii. Students iii. People with lived experience		
3	4.2	The course provider will evidence that they have created routes for regular engagement in the design and review of the curriculum from the following stakeholder groups; i. Employers ii. Practitioners iii. People with lived experience	14th November 2026	Standard area 4

As conditions have been attached to the approval, the course provider 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

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]

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

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

	Standard not met	Condition	Inspector recommendation
1	1.5	The course provider will evidence that they have created routes for regular engagement in the admissions process from the following stakeholder groups; i. Employers ii. Providers of observations iii. People with lived experience	Met
2	2.2	The course provider will evidence that they have created routes for regular engagement in the evaluation and improvement of the course from the following stakeholder groups; i. Employers ii. Students iii. People with lived experience	Met
3	4.2	The course provider will evidence that they have created routes for regular engagement in the design and review of the curriculum from the following stakeholder groups; i. Employers ii. Practitioners iii. People with lived experience	Met

Findings

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

38. In their conditions evidence submission, the course provider advised that they have established a bi-annual Partner Engagement and Discussion meeting with employers and people with lived experience. This meeting will provide a formal opportunity for these stakeholders to provide input into the admissions process (1.5), curriculum review (4.2), and course evaluation more broadly (2.2).

39. The course provider also reported that they have established Subject Committees for each BIA cohort, which will provide students with the opportunity to provide input on the evaluation and improvement of the course. An evaluation form is also provided to all BIA students at the end of each intake, as a further feedback opportunity for students. This student feedback is reviewed and acted on where viable and appropriate (2.2).

40. Following the review of the documentary evidence submitted, which included minutes of both the Partner Engagement and Discussion meeting and the Subject Committee, the inspection team are satisfied that the conditions set against the approval of the University of Lincoln's BIA course is met.