

Inspection Report

Inspection ID	UWEBR1_BCP338
Course provider	University of the West of England, Bristol
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	Best Interests Assessment
Mode of study	Part time
Maximum student cohort	25
Date of inspection	24 – 25 January 2026
Inspection team	Katie Parkin (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Bradley Allan (Lay Inspector) Kate Lees (BIA registrant Inspector)
Inspector recommendation	Approved
Regulator decision:	Approved
Date of Regulator decision:	22 April 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 University of the West of England Bristol as ‘the course provider’ and we describe the Best Interests Assessor Module as ‘the course’.

Summary of Inspection

5. University of the West of England Bristol and Best Interests Assessor Module 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 24 – 25 January 2026.
7. As part of this process the inspection team gathered feedback from key stakeholders through meetings on inspection. This included the course team students, employer partners, people with lived experience.

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'.

<u>Standard 1. Admissions</u>	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>	
<p><u>Key observations for standard 1</u></p>	

9. We were satisfied that there was a transparent and robust admissions process for the course. Applicants are required to complete a Readiness to Study (RTS) statement. This requires them to evidence relevant practice experience, experience of applying the Mental Capacity Act and human rights legislation, and academic achievements to date. Applicants are encouraged to reference the six BIA capabilities to demonstrate existing relevant experience and identify gaps in their knowledge. Employer partners described strong knowledge of their staff and robust internal processes for assessing suitability prior to application. We were assured that communication between employer partners and the course team is effective and supports shared understanding of applicant readiness. (Standards 1.1, 1.2, 1.4)

10. Suitability and ongoing eligibility are addressed through the application and admissions process.. Applicants are required to provide professional registration details and complete declarations confirming their fitness to undertake the programme.. Applicants must also confirm that they hold an appropriate DBS certificate. Employer partners confirmed that professional conduct and suitability are considered within their internal sponsorship processes prior to nomination, with any concerns identified and addressed through their own governance procedures before application. For self-funded applicants, the course team reviews DBS documentation directly as part of the admissions process. We sought clarification regarding expectations around the currency and recording of DBS certificates, and the team confirmed that these are reviewed at application stage with professional judgement applied where necessary. Taken together, these arrangements provide proportionate assurance that applicants meet professional requirements at entry and that mechanisms are in place to address any changes in circumstances during the programme, while noting the reliance on employer processes for elements of pre-entry assurance. (Standards 1.2 ,1.6)

11. The RTS Expectations document set out clear criteria, including expectations around legal literacy. Where insufficient evidence is provided, applicants are contacted and asked to revise their RTS statements or are signposted to further learning before re-applying. The course team confirmed that the application materials have been amended to make explicit reference to the balance between risk and rights within BIA practice. This amendment clarifies expectations at the point of entry and reinforces the programme's commitment to human rights based practice. This demonstrates a reflective and proportionate approach to managing risk at the point of entry. (Standards 1.3, 1.4)

12. We confirmed that people with lived experience contributed to the development of the RTS statement and are involved in readiness for practice discussions. Employer partners participate in interviews and undertake their own

<p>internal selection processes prior to application. The course team described an established involvement of people with lived experience across the university, including within the BIA course. People with lived experience could also attest to this and gave the inspection team clear examples of this. We were satisfied that involvement was appropriate, purposeful, and proportionate. (Standard 1.5)</p> <p>13. Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) data is collected at the point of application. The course team acknowledged that cohort sizes are small, limiting statistically significant trend analysis. However, they demonstrated that data is reviewed holistically and used to inform support and reasonable adjustments. Students can request reasonable adjustments at application stage and throughout the programme. We were satisfied that EDI considerations are embedded proportionately within the admissions process. The university had established central EDI monitoring processes, supported by a business intelligence function that analyses data across programmes. However, as this is a module rather than a standalone programme, admissions data is not routinely collected or analysed at module level, including in relation to EDI characteristics. As a result, EDI data specific to admissions is not regularly reviewed or shared with employer partners. While no evidence of adverse impact has been identified, the absence of systematic, module level data limits the module team’s ability to demonstrate active oversight of access and equity in admissions. Therefore, it is recommended that the course provider implement a proportionate and regular process for reviewing EDI data in relation to admissions to the BIA programme, including engagement with employer partners where cohort sizes limit formal statistical analysis. (Standard 1.7)</p> <p>14. We noted that most admissions information is clearly accessible on the university website. However, the pathway from achieving an approved BIA qualification to employment as a BIA is not clearly explained online. The course team acknowledged this and identified this as an area for improvement. Strengthening this information would enhance transparency for prospective applicants and employer partners. (Standard 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>

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.	MET
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
<p><u>Key observations for standard 2.</u></p> <p>15. The management and governance structure was clearly articulated during the course presentation and supporting documentation. The course team provided assurance regarding resourcing arrangements, and we were able to access the CVs of the course team. It was evident that the course was led by individuals with relevant professional experience, and the mapping narrative clearly demonstrated that staff were appropriately qualified and experienced, including the involvement of approved BIAs within the teaching team. The course lead demonstrated extensive experience and described clear contingency arrangements supporting programme continuity, explaining how the programme would continue to be effectively delivered in the event of staff absence. The team provided assurance regarding professional development, research engagement, and mechanisms for maintaining currency in BIA practice. Taken together, we</p>	

<p>were satisfied that staffing and governance requirements were met. (Standards 2.1, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6)</p> <p>16. Course governance processes were clearly evidenced. Student feedback had informed enhancements to the programme, and the Course Governance Handbook demonstrated that employer partners and people with lived experience were involved in course related meetings. Academic governance structures, including academic boards, played a clear role in quality assurance and continuous improvement. The course team demonstrated a reflective approach, identifying areas for future development and articulating how enhancements would be implemented. We were satisfied that governance processes were functioning effectively. (Standard 2.2, 2.7)</p> <p>17. The admissions model supported sustainable course delivery. The course team explained that admissions are managed with regard to the availability of appropriate observation opportunities. For employer-sponsored applicants, observation capacity is considered as part of local workforce planning and nomination processes. Independent applicants are required to identify suitable observation arrangements in advance, which are reviewed by the course lead to ensure they meet programme requirements. This approach is intended to ensure that all students can access appropriate practice observation and that cohort numbers remain locally sustainable. The programme’s part-time structure and use of online learning methods supported accessibility and wide participation without compromising quality. We were satisfied that student numbers were appropriately managed. (Standard 2.3)</p>	
<p>Standard 3. Observation opportunities.</p>	<p>Met or not met</p>
<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. 	<p>MET</p>

<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>	<p>MET</p>
<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>	<p>MET</p>
<p>Key observations for standard 3.</p> <p>18 Students are required to complete a minimum of two DoLS observation opportunities as part of the programme requirements. This requirement is communicated clearly at application stage and monitored through the assessment process to ensure completion. Suitability is considered in advance, with students required to confirm details of the setting and practitioner, and these arrangements are reviewed by the course lead to ensure that the experience aligns with programme expectations. (Standard 3.1)</p> <p>19. The course team demonstrated a structured approach to managing observation experiences. They described efforts to ensure observations were contrasting where possible, supporting breadth of learning. The module leadership arrangements supported student oversight, with responsibilities shared to enhance student support. We were satisfied that observation experiences were appropriately monitored and supported. (Standard 3.2)</p> <p>20. The guidance and expectations for observation providers were clearly evidenced through documentation shared with students and observers. The BIA Observation Form outlined requirements for completion of observations, including logging activities, evidencing ongoing professional registration and CPD, and identifying student responsibilities. Employer partners demonstrated clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The course team explained their decision to retain flexibility regarding observation timeframes, which we considered reasonable. We identified opportunities to further strengthen guidance, particularly in relation to ethical practice and the processes for gaining informed consent from those being observed. While these aspects are not currently formalised in written guidance, we were satisfied that the standard was met. It is recommended that the course provider develop and provide guidance to ensure that all observations are undertaken ethically and that consent is consistently obtained and recorded. (Standard 3.3)</p>	
<p>Standard 4. Curriculum and assessment</p>	<p>Met or not met</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>MET</p>

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.	
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.	MET
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

<p>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.</p>	<p>MET</p>
<p>4.12 Clearly specify requirements for student progression and achievement within the course.</p>	<p>MET</p>
<p>4.13 Clearly specify that any equivalent award which may be made will not lead to eligibility to be approved as a BIA.</p>	<p>MET</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>MET</p>
<p><u>Key observations for standard 4.</u></p> <p>21. The course team demonstrated that the programme content, structure, and delivery are explicitly aligned to the BIA capabilities. Mapping documentation confirmed that teaching sessions, assessments, and learning activities are designed to ensure students acquire the knowledge, skills, and professional behaviours required to meet the standards expected of a Best Interests Assessor. Employer partners demonstrated meaningful involvement in the programme. They described their participation in assessments and contributions to course processes, including involvement in Form 3 reviews. Additional evidence clarified the involvement of people with lived experience, and discussions confirmed that these contributions were directly relevant to the BIA course and enhanced the learning experience. We were satisfied that the combination of a well structured, mapped programme and active stakeholder engagement provides assurance that the course equips students with the knowledge and skills required for BIA practice. (Standards 4.1 and 4.2)</p> <p>22. Arrangements supporting EDI were clearly evidenced. Documentation and mapping narratives demonstrated that support for students with disabilities, including reasonable adjustments, was available and appropriately signposted. Module reporting demonstrated that EDI data was analysed in relation to student achievement. We were satisfied that the programme met EDI expectations. (Standard 4.3)</p>	

23. The course team demonstrated strong engagement with developments in law, policy, and research. Staff described maintaining awareness of changes in legislation and case law, and provided examples of how teaching had historically adapted to reflect legal developments. Teaching inputs were enriched through guest lectures and specialist contributions. We were satisfied that curriculum content remained current and relevant. (Standard 4.4)

24. Teaching and learning materials clearly supported the application of legal and ethical principles to practice. Case studies, discussions, and assessments provided opportunities for students to apply legal literacy and reflect on the autonomous nature of the BIA role. We were satisfied that the curriculum design effectively supports the development of professional capabilities, with content, assessments, and learning activities specifically aligned to equip students to undertake Best Interests Assessments and fulfil their responsibilities under the DoLS framework. Students are supported to develop the knowledge, skills, and professional judgement required to apply the Mental Capacity Act and DoLS legislation in practice. (Standards 4.5, 4.10, 4.11)

25. Curriculum structure and duration were justified and responsive. The course team explained enhancements made following student feedback, including extending the programme to reflect the increasing complexity of the legal landscape. Students confirmed that the course had prepared them effectively for practice. We were satisfied that curriculum design and delivery met the requirements of the standard. (Standard 4.6)

26. The course team demonstrated that students benefit from the involvement of people with lived and living experience in teaching and learning activities. This includes contributions to case studies, discussions during teaching sessions, and input into course materials to ensure they reflect real-world practice and service user perspectives. Students are exposed to multiple viewpoints, helping them understand the experiences of those subject to DoLS and BIA assessments. Employer partners and PWLE contributors are actively involved in preparatory arrangements and teaching sessions, enhancing the authenticity and relevance of the learning experience. (Standard 4.7)

27. Assessment governance arrangements were clearly articulated. The course team described the rationale for assessment design, including revisions supporting legal literacy. Documentary evidence demonstrated robust academic regulations, moderation processes, reasonable adjustments, and mitigating circumstances procedures. No alternative awards were available, reflecting the CPD nature of the module. Completion of the programme is contingent on students successfully passing all assessments and completing the required

<p>observations, ensuring that progression is dependent on demonstrating competence across all elements. External Examiner arrangements were clearly evidenced. We were satisfied that assessment processes were robust and defensible. (Standards 4.8, 4.12, 4.13, 4.14)</p> <p>28. Students described receiving feedback through group discussions and written assessment processes. They confirmed that feedback supported their learning, although some students expressed preferences regarding the format in which feedback was provided. Feedback described by students related primarily to cohort level formative feedback, for example through in class discussions of common themes and areas of difficulty arising from assessments, including the law exam. This feedback was intended to support learning across the cohort rather than provide individualised commentary. Some students reported that, while this approach was helpful, it was not always clear how cohort level feedback related specifically to their own performance. We were satisfied that feedback mechanisms met academic requirements However, it is recommended that the course provider consider ways to make cohort level formative feedback more clearly linked to individual performance, for example by explicitly signposting how common themes may apply at an individual level, to better support targeted learning and reflection. (Standard 4.9).</p>	
<p>Standard 5. Supporting students.</p>	<p>Met or not met</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>MET</p>
<p>5.2 Ensure that students have access to a system of academic and pastoral support for their progression, development and welfare.</p>	<p>MET</p>
<p>5.3 Ensure that there is a thorough and effective process for ensuring the ongoing suitability of students' conduct, character and health.</p>	<p>MET</p>
<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>

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
<p><u>Key observations for standard 5.</u></p> <p>29. Student support and wellbeing arrangements were clearly described. The course team outlined university wide support services and described how the professional demands of the BIA role were discussed from induction onwards. Students described the transition to the BIA role as challenging, and discussions confirmed that wellbeing considerations were integrated into programme delivery. We were satisfied that student welfare was appropriately supported. (Standard 5.1)</p> <p>30. Pastoral and academic support mechanisms were clearly evidenced. The course team described individual support arrangements, including tutorials and tailored support plans where required. Where adjustments may impact a student's observation or practice arrangements, these are communicated to</p>	

employer partners to ensure the student can participate fully and safely. Employer partners were identified as key contributors to student support through supervision structures. We were satisfied that support arrangements were appropriate and accessible. (Standard 5.2, 5.4)

31. Suitability and fitness to study considerations are embedded within the application and course processes. Applicants are required to declare that they will notify the UWE Bristol module team if any concerns arise during their course of study. As part of ongoing enhancements following the inspection, the course team has added explicit wording to the application form, highlighting the need for students to disclose any disabilities or issues that may affect their participation, in line with terms and conditions. Employer partners confirmed that they would raise any concerns through their own internal processes and communicate relevant issues to UWE, and suggested that more regular discussion between employer partners and the university could strengthen shared understanding of responsibilities for raising fitness to practise or suitability concerns. Review of the application pack and observation forms demonstrated that these link directly to policies around fitness to study and suitability of practice. We were satisfied that appropriate safeguards are in place to ensure students meet professional requirements and maintain fitness to practise. (Standard 5.3)

32. Information regarding curriculum, assessment, CPD expectations, and academic processes was clearly provided through programme documentation. Academic appeals processes and whistleblowing policies were clearly signposted. Safeguarding and reporting mechanisms were described by both the course team and employer partners. We were satisfied that information and protection mechanisms met regulatory expectations. (Standards 5.5, 5.6, 5.8, 5.9)

33. Students described their experiences of assessment feedback. While views on feedback format varied, students confirmed that feedback supported learning and progression. Students reported that feedback was provided within the expected timeframe, in line with academic regulations, ensuring it could be acted on promptly. We were satisfied that feedback processes were consistent with academic regulations. (Standard 5.7)

Proposed outcome

34. The inspection team recommend that the course be approved.

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

Recommendations

35. The inspectors identified the following recommendations for the course provider. These recommendations highlight areas that the course provider may wish to consider. The recommendations do not affect any decision relating to course approval.

	Standard	Detail	Link
1	1.7	It is recommended that the course provider regularly monitor their EDI policies in relation to the application process with stakeholders.	1.7
2	1.8	The inspection team recommends that the course provider ensure information is provided to applicants about the pathway from qualification to employment as a BIA.	1.8
3	3.3	It is recommended that the course provider offer guidance to ensure observations are undertaken ethically and gaining consent.	3.3
4	4.9	It is recommended that the course provider consider ways to make formative feedback more actionable for individual students, for example by clarifying how cohort-level feedback relates to individual performance, to support targeted learning and reflection.	4.9