

Inspection Report

Inspection ID	UMR1_BCP329
Course provider	University of Manchester
Validating body (if different)	
Course inspected	Best Interests Assessor
Mode of study	Part time
Maximum student cohort	40
Date of inspection	20 to 21 January 2026
Inspection team	Becky Madey (Education Quality Assurance Officer) Sally Gosling (Lay Inspector) Nicole Richards (BIA Registrant Inspector)
Inspector recommendation	Approved
Regulator decision:	Approved
Date of Regulator decision:	01 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.
3. 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.
4. 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](#).
5. In this document we describe the University of Manchester as ‘the course provider’ and we describe the Best Interests Assessor course as ‘the course’.

Summary of Inspection

6. The University of Manchester’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.
7. A remote inspection took place from 20 to 21 January 2026.
8. As part of this process the inspection team gathered feedback from key stakeholders through meetings on inspection. This included course staff, members of the senior leadership team, wider university support services, students, employer partners and people with lived experience. Written feedback was also gathered from students in advance of the inspection.

Inspection Findings

9. 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
<p>Key observations for standard 1</p> <p>10. The course provider accepted applications from sponsored students only. We heard that the admissions process consisted of a professional support form and an interview. The form was</p>	

completed by the employer and confirmed that the applicant was registered with a relevant regulatory body. Registration was checked by the course provider. (1.2)

11. The form provided confirmation of a valid enhanced DBS check, including the DBS number, and that the applicant had suitable conduct, character and health. The form was also used to confirm that applicants would be provided with a minimum of two observational opportunities with a qualified BIA, who had suitable prior experience and had the capability to effectively use ICT. Any issues arising from the professional support form would be escalated to the course leader. (1.1, 1.3, 1.6)

12. Within the admissions documentation, we noted that the relevant regulatory bodies were not clearly outlined listed for students with professional backgrounds other than registered social workers. Therefore, the inspection team recommended that admissions documentation be reviewed to provide clarity to applicants and their employers regarding eligibility criteria. This would aid their ability to make an informed choice about joining the course. (1.1, 1.2, 1.8)

13. Employers interviewed their applicant and assess their level of legal literacy using standard interview questions provided by the course team. The interview questions were marked without a scoring matrix. We heard that the questions focused upon the principles of the Mental Capacity Act and how applicants would integrate values-based practice into their answers. We saw admissions guidance which outlined the process to both applicants and employers. Students confirmed that the course provider's taster day session provided the necessary information to make an informed choice about whether to take up a place on the course. (1.1, 1.4, 1.8)

14. We heard from employers that they were confident in undertaking the admissions process in line with the course provider's guidance. It was noted that without a scoring matrix, employers may have different understandings of the level of legal literacy and suitable prior experience required for applicants. Therefore, the inspection team recommended that further course provider oversight was considered to seek to ensure a parity of understanding across employers. (1.3, 1.4)

15. The course team confirmed that the admissions process was co-designed through a stakeholder sub-group of the Course Management Committee (CMC). This sub-group consisted of a former BIA student, a person with lived experience and an employer partner. We heard from people with lived experience that they reviewed draft interview questions for applicants. (1.5)

16. We understood that all interviewers were expected to have undertaken the EDI training mandated by their employer and adhere to their relevant EDI policies. We heard from the course team that interview questions would be sent to the applicants an hour before the interview. All applicants would be given the opportunity to request any reasonable adjustments through the admissions process. Admissions data is collected and reviewed at the point of enrolment. It was acknowledged that the course provider does not yet collect data at employer stage, but this was an intention in the future. The inspection team recommended that the course team should collaborate

further with employers to consider and respond to EDI issues and trends in the admissions process. (1.7).

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.	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

Key observations for standard 2.

17. The course leader, with overall professional responsibility for the course, was a registered social worker and a qualified BIA. We reviewed their CV, which demonstrated appropriate experience of BIA practice. We saw the course provider’s governance structure, which outlined how oversight of the course was achieved at division, school and faculty levels. The course team demonstrated clear

roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability, as well as explained their relevant experience and expertise. (2.1, 2.4)

18. A contingency plan was outlined which provided assurance of arrangements to deal with circumstances such as staff absence. We heard that resourcing would be reviewed if the course provider were to increase their number of intakes per academic year, with examples of how staff within the course team would be upskilled. We understood that the course team were offered protected time to ensure that their knowledge remained current and relevant, for example through returning to practice, attending forums, and subscribing to key external resources. (2.5, 2.6)

19. The CMC, which included employer partners, alumni, and people with lived experience, met quarterly to ensure that course content, delivery and assessment remained current and relevant. Sub-groups were used to focus on key areas of the course, such as observation opportunities and the admissions process. The course team liaised with employer partners to understand workforce demand for the course, which was greater than the intake capacity at the time of inspection. Employers confirmed that they were able to secure observation opportunities for their students. (2.2, 2.3)

20. We heard from students that they had multiple opportunities to feedback throughout the course, including the use of real time Mentimeter surveys at the middle and end of teaching, and a unit evaluation survey. We saw that student feedback was shared within a report to employer partners. The course team offered examples of improvements that had been made, or would be implemented, as a result of stakeholder feedback. (2.7).

<u>Standard 3. Observation opportunities.</u>	<u>Met or not met</u>
<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"> <li>i. enables the student to shadow a BIA or community DoLS assessment. <li>ii. provide practice experience that can be applied to a variety of settings and types of supervisory body. <li>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. <li>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>	<p>Met</p>
<p><u>Key observations for standard 3.</u></p> <p>21. The course team confirmed that all students would undertake two observation opportunities with a qualified BIA, which employers committed to through the applicant’s Professional Support Form. One observation would take place within a maximum period of six months prior to course enrolment, and the second would take place during the course.</p> <p>22. We read the course provider’s Observational Opportunities Guidance, which outlined expectations to students and employers. It was recommended that students should experience contrasting observations where possible. Employer partners and students confirmed the availability of both observation opportunities, although there were some issues reported around accessing these within a timely manner. We heard from the course team that as a result of feedback from employer partners, the recruitment lead time had been increased to six months to resolve this. The course team confirmed that they would escalate any issues related to observation internally and would work with employer partners to find a resolution. Observation opportunities were discussed as part of the CMC agenda, which involved employer partner membership. (3.1, 3.3)</p> <p>23. Students completed a template form for each observation and used their second observation to complete a reflective assignment, in which the course team were able to confirm that students had met the relevant learning outcomes of the course. A member of the course team would then complete a scrutiny form to ensure that the observations were relevant and appropriate. (3.1, 3.2).</p>	
<p><u>Standard 4. Curriculum and assessment</u></p>	<p><u>Met or not met</u></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 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.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Met</p>
<p>4.3 Ensure that the course is designed in accordance with equality, diversity and inclusion principles, and, human rights and legislative frameworks.</p>	<p>Met</p>

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.

24. The BIA course was taught over seven days at the time of inspection, which was deemed by students and employers as sufficient to meet the required level of competence. We saw how the course content and learning outcomes were mapped against the 6 BIA capabilities, which was communicated to students. Teaching slides demonstrated how students would be equipped with knowledge and skills related to standard 4.11, including conflict, supporting individuals, families and carers, multi-disciplinary working and complex decision-making. (4.1, 4.6, 4.11)

25. Employer partners and students confirmed that upon completion of the course, learners were able to practise competently as a BIA. The course provider accepted Welsh students onto the course and we heard from students that cross-national border issues in relation to practice in Wales were incorporated well within teaching and that people with lived experience delivered a workshop during the course. Students confirmed that the use of case law, case studies and their formative assessment enabled them to integrate theory and practice. Students were encouraged to engage critically with research and data sources to develop an evidence-informed approach to assessment and evaluation. Observation templates were used to support students in reflecting on their experience and the integration of theoretical knowledge. (4.2, 4.5, 4.10)

26. The CMC (which included employer partners, alumni, and people with lived experience), used sub-groups to support the review and ongoing development of the curriculum. The course team offered examples of changes that were made based on stakeholder feedback. We saw how the course team remained up to date with developments in research, legislation, government policy, best practice and case law, and how these changes were incorporated within the course. It was confirmed that staff received protected time to maintain their knowledge and reflect on teaching and learning. (4.2, 4.4, 4.7)

27. We understood how the course was inclusive by design through a range of examples provided by the university. The course team confirmed that staff made reasonable adjustments to the programme's delivery in response to individual students' additional learning needs. Attainment data had been collated and reviewed for students across four cohorts, disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, disability and age.

28. We heard during the meeting with students and alumni that there had been a request to include neurodiversity and LGBTQIA+ data within this analysis, which had not been actioned at the time of the inspection. The inspection team recommended that the course provider should review the range of EDI data that they capture and analyse. (4.3)

29. The summative assessment for the course comprised a reflective commentary based upon the student's second observation and a multiple-choice legal assessment. We saw that formative assessments were integrated into the course. Students were required to pass both summative assessments to complete the course successfully and were informed of their reassessment

opportunities if they received a failing grade. It was confirmed that the course provider did not offer an alternative award. (4.12, 4.13)

30. The course team confirmed that they received feedback from an external examiner, alumni and people with lived experience to monitor the suitability of assessment. We understood that standard university governance processes applied to the BIA course to ensure the quality and fairness of assessment. We reviewed the CV of the course provider's external examiner at the time of the inspection, as well as the overarching external examiner procedure. (4.8, 4.14)

31. All assessment feedback would be received by students within 15 working days and included a combination of positive themes and areas for improvement linked to the course learning objectives. Students who failed assessed work were encouraged to arrange an individual tutorial with the marker. Students confirmed that they received timely and meaningful feedback throughout the course, through assessments and teaching, as well as from peers and their observing BIAs. (4.9)

<u>Standard 5. Supporting students.</u>	<u>Met or not met</u>
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.

32. We understood that BIA students gained access to all support services within the university related to their health and wellbeing, including confidential counselling services. Reasonable adjustments could be made during the course and Individual Student Support Plans would be shared with the course team. Students were encouraged by the course provider to share any issues or reasonable adjustments with their employer. Students confirmed access to these services. (5.1, 5.4)

33. Students completed suitability checks prior to enrolment and were reminded during day one of teaching of their responsibility to declare any changes in their circumstances related to conduct, character and health. We saw that the students would be referred to a Concern Review Panel in line with the university's Fitness to Practice procedure should issues arise. (5.3)

34. The course provider outlined a range of academic support available. The course leader was available for 1:1 tutorial with students as their academic advisor. Students confirmed that they understood how to access academic support. Mandatory formative feedback gave the course team the opportunity to highlight where targeted academic support was required. As per standard 4.9, students confirmed that they received timely and meaningful feedback throughout the course, both through assessments and teaching. (5.2, 5.7)

35. Students confirmed that they received information about their course prior to enrolment and understood the requirements following the completion of their course. We heard that students were aware of how to make academic appeals and how to use policies and procedures such as whistleblowing to challenge unsafe behaviours. We saw a range of materials provided to students which outlined details relating to curriculum, observations and assessments. The course team confirmed, following student feedback, that the final day of teaching detailed implications for continuing practice. (5.5, 5.6, 5.8, 5.9)

Outcome

The inspection team recommend that the course be approved.

The regulator decision maker agreed with this recommendation.

Recommendations

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 (s)	Detail	Link
1	1.1, 1.2, 1.8	The inspection team recommended that the course provider should review documentation to provide clarity to applicants and their employers regarding eligibility criteria, to aid their ability to make an informed choice about joining the course.	1.1 , 1.2,1.8
2	1.3, 1.4	The inspection team recommended that the course provider should consider how to ensure parity in how employers assess applicants within the admissions process.	1.3, 1.4
3	1.7	The inspection team recommended that the course team should collaborate further with employers to consider and respond to EDI issues and trends in the admissions process.	1.7
4	4.3	The inspection team recommended that the course provider should review the range of EDI data that they capture and analyse.	4.3