

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar gyfer yr [ymchwiliad i recriwtio a chadw athrawon](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) on the [Inquiry into Teacher recruitment and retention](#)

Ymateb gan: Prifysgol Wrexham
Response from: Wrexham University

Executive Summary

This submission presents findings from a study conducted at Wrexham Glyndwr University (WGU) exploring the efficacy of a resilience training programme tailored for trainee teachers in the Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) sector. Amidst growing concerns over teacher recruitment and retention in Wales, the study demonstrates how resilience training can significantly enhance retention rates, attendance, and graduate employment outcomes. Key recommendations include embedding resilience training into teacher education programmes and addressing systemic pressures to support early career teachers effectively.

1. Introduction and Context

The recruitment and retention of teachers in Wales is an urgent challenge, with far-reaching implications for the quality and sustainability of education. In the PCET sector, which serves learners beyond compulsory school age, the teaching workforce faces unique pressures: an ageing demographic, high attrition rates among trainees and early career teachers, and increasing mental health challenges exacerbated by workload and external stressors. These issues threaten the ability of educational institutions to deliver consistent, high-quality learning experiences, particularly in further education colleges and adult learning settings.

The Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into this matter is both timely and essential. Addressing the teacher shortage requires innovative, evidence-based strategies that not only attract new educators but also ensure they remain in the profession long-term. This submission contributes to that effort by presenting evidence from a study conducted at Wrexham University, which evaluated a resilience training programme designed to bolster the perseverance and well-being of trainee teachers both during their post-graduate study and once they have completed their study and working in their first teaching role.

The study's findings suggest that resilience training over an extended period of time offers a practical and scalable solution to the recruitment and retention crisis. Though settings have delivered short courses and 1-day training courses on the topics of resilience well-being, this is very often seen as 'tick-box' by some teachers and therefore not of value to their personal and mental well-being or it lacks the time for them to fully engage with one another and support their cohesive development.

This extended resilience training (over 9 months) equipped trainees with the tools to navigate the emotional and professional demands of teaching. The programme improved

completion rates, attendance, and employment outcomes in the 2021/22 academic year. The success of it has also led to it now being a mandatory module for all of our Foundation Year undergraduate students at the University (increasing retention by 23% over the last two years) and from 2025/26 academic year, it will be a core module for the PGCE PCET Students.

This submission outlines the research methodology, details the training programme, discusses its impacts, and provides recommendations for policy and practice to strengthen the teaching workforce across Wales.

2. Research Overview

Background and Aims

The study was undertaken as part of a Doctor of Education (EdD) thesis at Wrexham University, prompted by a concerning trend in the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) PCET programme. Between the academic years 2017/18 and 2020/21, completion rates declined from 68% to 54%, reflecting a broader national challenge of trainee teacher attrition. The research sought to investigate whether a structured resilience training programme could reverse this trend by enhancing trainees' capacity to cope with the stresses of their training and early career stages.

The primary aims were threefold:

- To assess the feasibility of implementing a resilience training programme within an existing teacher training curriculum.
- To measure the programme's impact on retention, attendance, and graduate employment rates.
- To explore trainees' subjective experiences of the training and its influence on their professional development.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to provide a robust evaluation of the programme's effectiveness:

- **Quantitative Data:** Retention rates, attendance records, and graduate employment outcomes were collected for the 2021/22 cohort and compared to historical data from previous years.
- **Qualitative Data:** Semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires 6 months after completion of the programme were conducted with participants to capture their perceptions of the training's benefits and challenges once working in the teaching role.
- **Participant Selection:** Trainees were screened using Duckworth's Grit Questionnaire, a validated tool measuring perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Those scoring below 4.1 (indicating lower resilience) were invited to join the programme, ensuring the intervention targeted those most at risk of dropping out.

Programme Implementation

The resilience training programme spanned nine months, with sessions held monthly to complement the trainees' academic and placement schedules. Each session lasted approximately one hour and incorporated group discussions and reflective writing exercises, designed to build resilience through peer support and self-reflection.

3. The Resilience Training Programme

Design and Rationale

The programme was informed by resilience interventions from other high-pressure fields, such as healthcare and the military, where structured support has proven effective in reducing burnout and improving retention. In the context of teacher training, resilience was defined as the ability to adapt to stress, maintain well-being, and persist in the face of setbacks—qualities essential for navigating the complexities of teaching.

The programme's design was tailored to address the specific challenges reported by trainees, including workload pressures, self-doubt, and isolation during teaching placements. By fostering self-awareness, peer support, and practical coping strategies, the training aimed to create a resilient cohort capable of thriving in their professional roles.

Structure and Content

The programme comprised two core components:

1. Group Discussions

- These trainee-led sessions provided a safe space to discuss experiences, challenges, and strategies for overcoming obstacles.
- Facilitated by a trained educator, the circles encouraged collaborative problem-solving and the development of a supportive peer network.
- Topics included managing stress, building confidence, and fostering a sense of purpose in teaching.

2. Reflective Writing Exercises:

- Based on Bain et al.'s (2002) 5Rs framework (Reporting, Responding, Relating, Reasoning, Reconstructing), trainees engaged in structured reflection on their experiences.
- Exercises prompted participants to process setbacks constructively, identify personal strengths, and plan for future challenges.
- Example prompts included: "Describe a difficult moment in your training and how you responded," and "What strategies can you use to manage workload effectively?"

Session Themes

The eight sessions covered a range of topics, each building on the previous to create a cumulative effect:

- **Session 1: Introduction to Resilience** – Defining resilience and its relevance to teaching.

- **Session 2: Building Confidence** – Overcoming imposter syndrome and self-doubt.
- **Session 3: Managing Threat and Challenge** – Strategies for handling stress and adversity.
- **Session 4: Collaboration and Community** – Strengthening peer support networks.
- **Session 5: Psychological First Aid** – Using dialogue to support mental well-being.
- **Session 6: Mindfulness and Self-Regulation** – Techniques for maintaining focus and calm.
- **Session 7: Workload Management** – Practical tools for balancing teaching demands.
- **Session 8: Looking Forward** – Reflecting on growth and preparing for the profession.

Delivery and Adaptations

Sessions were delivered in a hybrid format, with most held in person and two conducted online to accommodate placement schedules. Feedback from participants was used to refine the programme mid-course, ensuring it remained responsive to their needs. For example, additional time was allocated to workload management after trainees identified this as a persistent challenge.

4. Impact and Benefits

The resilience training programme produced measurable improvements across multiple domains, supported by both quantitative data and qualitative insights.

Quantitative Outcomes

- **Retention:** All participants completed the PGCE programme, contributing to a cohort-wide completion rate of 77% in 2021/22—a 23% increase from the previous year's 54%. This marked improvement suggests that resilience training can significantly reduce attrition.
- **Attendance:** Participants attended 86% of their scheduled classes and placements, compared to an average of 72% in prior cohorts. Enhanced attendance reflects greater engagement and commitment to the training process.
- **Graduate Employment:** Within six months of graduation, 88% of participants secured teaching positions in the PCET sector, surpassing the national average for graduate teacher employment. This outcome underscores the programme's role in preparing trainees for successful careers.

Qualitative Feedback

Interviews and questionnaires revealed the programme's profound impact on trainees' personal and professional development:

- **Self-Awareness and Growth:** Reflective writing helped trainees reframe setbacks as opportunities for learning. One participant noted, "When I got a referral on my first placement, I felt crushed. Writing about it showed me it wasn't the end—it was a chance to improve."

- **Peer Support:** The group discussions fostered a sense of belonging, countering the isolation often experienced during placements. A trainee commented, “Knowing others struggled too made me feel less alone. We lifted each other up.”
- **Confidence and Preparedness:** Participants reported feeling more equipped to handle teaching challenges. One said, “The sessions gave me tools to stay calm and focused, even on tough days. I’m ready for this job now.”

Broader Implications

The programme’s success extends beyond individual outcomes, offering a model for addressing systemic issues in teacher training. By building resilience early, it reduces the likelihood of burnout and dropout, creating a more stable and committed workforce.

5. Recommendations

The study’s findings provide a foundation for actionable policy changes to improve teacher recruitment and retention in Wales:

1. **Embed Resilience Training in Teacher Education:**
 - Integrate resilience training into all initial teacher education programmes, using the WGU model as a template. This should include mandatory modules on stress management, peer support, and reflective practice.
 - Allocate funding to train educators in delivering such programmes effectively.
 2. **Reduce Systemic Pressures:**
 - Address workload and administrative burdens, which remain significant barriers to retention. Schools and colleges should implement policies to streamline tasks and protect teaching time for early career teachers.
 - Provide mentoring and reduced timetables for new teachers to ease their transition into the profession.
 3. **Foster Peer Support Networks:**
 - Encourage institutions to establish formal peer support structures, such as mentoring circles or professional learning communities, to sustain the benefits of resilience training beyond initial education.
 - Promote collaboration between trainees and experienced teachers to share strategies and build resilience collectively.
 4. **Invest in Further Research:**
 - Fund larger-scale, longitudinal studies to validate and refine the resilience training approach across diverse educational contexts in Wales.
 - Explore the programme’s adaptability to other sectors, such as primary and secondary education, to maximize its impact.
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6. Conclusion

The resilience training programme evaluated at Wrexham Glyndwr University represents a promising strategy for tackling the teacher recruitment and retention crisis in Wales in all sectors of teaching training and not necessarily purely post-compulsory teacher training.

By improving retention rates, attendance, and graduate employment outcomes, it demonstrates the value of equipping trainees with the skills and support needed to succeed in a demanding profession. The qualitative feedback further underscores its role in fostering confidence, community, and resilience among participants.

Addressing this crisis requires a dual focus: enhancing individual capacity through targeted interventions like resilience training, and reforming systemic conditions to create a supportive environment for educators.

I am grateful for the chance to contribute to this inquiry and remain committed to supporting efforts to strengthen education in Wales.