

## TrACE CASE STUDY: Wrexham University

Wrexham University in the North-East of Wales, has campuses in Wrexham, Northop and St Asaph. It offers both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, as well as professional courses. The university had 6,045 students in 2022/23. As still one of the youngest universities in the UK (established in 2008), their mission is to inspire and enable; transforming people and places and driving economic, social and cultural success. Their activity is underpinned by their vision ‘To be a world leading modern civic university, regionally and globally engaged, delivering skills and impactful research which drive economic growth and innovation for the well-being of current and future generations’.

### Changes made in line with the TrACE Toolkit

#### Governance, leadership and organisation culture



##### Statement of commitment

*“At Wrexham University (WU) we are working to become a Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experience (TrACE)-informed institution. This project is being carried out in partnership with the Welsh Government-funded and Public Health Wales-hosted ACE Hub Wales.*

*Being TrACE-informed means developing a better understanding of trauma and the impact of trauma for everyone that works and studies at WU to better enable people who may have encountered trauma or adverse childhood experiences to progress and thrive while at the University and feel that they are treated with kindness, compassion, and respect.*

*Becoming TrACE-informed is not about treating trauma and symptoms, it's about developing a fundamental approach that recognises that adversity and trauma are a possibility for everyone, so that we can promote opportunities for well-being, healing, and recovery. It's also about recognising that we can all play a part in supporting this.*

*The TrACE-informed project works alongside, and with, the university's on-going social inclusion work, our strong commitment to mental health and wellbeing and our drive to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion in everything we do. It's a key priority of our civic mission partnership strategy which is working in partnership to tackle social inequalities across North Wales.”*

Wrexham University decided to align their TrACE Project and use of the TrACE Toolkit with their Civic Mission programme. This strategic approach has enabled the University to work beyond their institution and bring other organisations and sectors together, including education, health and social policy. An example of this is when the North Wales Children's University was established, and there was a commitment to design and deliver the pilot programme through a trauma-informed lens.

As a result of their work in this area, Wrexham University are widely regarded as the pioneers for this approach in Higher Education in Wales. They have adopted the Trauma-informed Wales five practice principles<sup>1</sup> to guide their trauma and ACE-informed activities:

- A Universal Approach that does no harm
- Person Centred
- Relationship-Focused
- Resilience and Strengths-focused
- Inclusive

When speaking to staff during the interview phase of this evaluation, it was widely recognised that trauma and ACEs were discussed at the senior leadership and Board of Governors level, and being trauma-informed, compassionate and kind is part of their University Strategy and Civic Mission. Visibility of the project, through staff conferences and leadership discussions, has been seen to play a key role in pushing forward ideas of wellness and trauma-informed practices, though it is recognised that more work is needed to reach everyone in the university.

## Policies and procedures



Wrexham University have made significant progress in reviewing their policies and procedures in line with a trauma and ACE-informed approach. Members of the TrACE project team were involved in the co-production with ACE Hub Wales of a 'Guidance for Trauma-informed Policy and Practice'. The guidance aims to ensure that policies are accessible and written in a way that can be digested in periods of stress. The project team's work with the Quality Assurance Team has been recognised by the Quality Assurance Agency who have now published a case study about the TrACE Toolkit in their resources.

Examples of policies that have been updated include:

- Academic Appeals Procedure (Sept 2024)
- Academic Integrity Procedure (2024/25)
- Assessment Policy (2024/25)
- Extenuating Circumstances Procedure (2024/25)
- Recognition of Prior and/or Experiential Learning Procedure (2024/25)

In the Ripple Effect Mapping (REM)<sup>2</sup> session, staff explained that students had been involved in the policy review process, leading to changes in the Extenuating Circumstances and Academic Conduct policies.

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1 [Trauma-informed Wales Framework](#)

2 This was a session facilitated by the evaluation team with staff members who had been involved in implementing the TrACE Toolkit. The purpose of the session was to understand if and how changes had led to impacts.

## Workforce training and support



A key piece of work carried out in this area was the creation of the Navigating the Storm animation. The work was funded by ACE Hub Wales and was designed to help communicate the message about trauma and ACEs and was developed alongside a review into terminology and understanding of these concepts. The animation has been shared nationally and internationally and has led to the development of additional resources (including Educational Workbooks and 'Project in a Box').

A further development in this domain has been the introduction of student TrACE champions. There are currently 50 active TrACE Champions (including 6 alumni) that are advocating a trauma and ACE-informed approach throughout the student body. Additionally, a 'Becoming Trauma Aware' interactive workshop has been developed and delivered to over 250 attendees, including staff, student groups and teaching and administration staff from schools.

Training and development opportunities are also being delivered by academic staff with expertise in trauma and ACEs. We interviewed a number of academics and support staff who have delivered training and awareness activities to staff and students across the University.

## Physical environment



The University have been working with an organisation based in the USA called TiD (Trauma-informed Design) Society to develop a physical environment audit tool for higher education providers. This will inform decisions about maintenance, refurbishment and new build programmes, promoting wellbeing and safety.

## Service design and delivery



In their Mental Health and Wellbeing Report (2024) it is clear that students have access to a range of support services, including Student Support Navigators (introduced in 2022/2023). These roles provide a critical link between academic members of staff and Student and Campus Life support teams to ensure students are signposted to the most appropriate services or interventions (both internal and external to the University).

During interviews, staff described their contribution to policy reviews and procedural changes within student services, including supporting the development of nature-based social prescribing. By simplifying trauma-informed practices and engaging in various groups, they have helped embed these principles across multiple initiatives. Another mentioned integrating TrACE training into personal tutor training, which now includes well-being questions for students.

## Monitoring and evaluation



Wrexham University published an evaluation report in 2023. The report shares findings from interviews with 24 people within and external to the University who are key enablers or stakeholders in the development and implementation of the TrACE project. Everyone was asked a small number of questions via Microsoft Teams about their involvement with TrACE, the impacts they have witnessed so far, the most significant change they've experienced and how the project has helped them to take a TrACE-informed approach.

In addition to this work, staff confirmed that they had completed a small-scale review of current monitoring and evaluation across the University and are now working with relevant departments to map out data and assess its impact. Some acknowledged the need for improved monitoring and recording, but despite some gaps, the team maintains a shared journey log documenting conferences, training, workshops, and reporting to mental health and equality, diversity and inclusion teams, which has been helpful. It was noted that the Project Manager brings all the monitoring and evaluation together.

## Evidence of Impact

### TrACE Champion feedback

During the evaluation we interviewed a TrACE champion to understand their role and what they thought about the training and support received.

The training provided by the university was described in positive terms and was seen to have prepared them for the role.

*"So, obviously before I had that [the training], I probably wouldn't have felt prepared to have done what I'm doing now."*

*"I really enjoyed being able to talk to other people. I've been through the training, I like the way the trainers are obviously facilitated by people that have been through the training themselves."*

This was reiterated in feedback data provided to us for the 2023/24 TrACE Championship Workshops and Student Union TrACE training, where positive feedback was received from participants:

*"I loved how interactive the session was and it was a relaxed session where people had the opportunity to voice their opinions and experiences"*

*"I am looking forward to becoming part of the TrACE champion group. I am looking forward to deepening my knowledge and understanding and putting it to good use"*

*"Having a greater understanding of what TrACE is has been valuable to me"*

*"The informal approach balanced with a structured presentation worked well. The interaction parts of the session were fun"*

We asked a TrACE champion if there was more the university could do to embed TrACE more effectively. Their response suggests it is a case of continuing with the work:

*“I think it’s just a case of continuing to bang the drum. I’m rolling it out to more and more departments, ensuring more people are aware about it. There really is an effort, attempts to change the culture.”*

## Wrexham University Evaluation

In their 2023 evaluation of the TrACE Toolkit<sup>3</sup>, Wrexham University were able to identify a number of emerging outcomes, including:

- **Developing people’s understanding** – the evaluation found increased awareness of what TrACE is and its importance. It was also felt that awareness raising and education activities had helped to clarify misconceptions about trauma-informed practices.
- **Practice impacts** – the evaluation reported changes in university policies and procedures to reflect trauma-informed principles. This included implementation of new practices such as trigger warnings on lecture content and adjustments to assignment deadlines.
- **Students as partners** – there was active involvement of students in the TrACE project. This was achieved through different initiatives such as the Kindness Campaign and TrACE Champions.
- **Culture and leadership** – it was felt there was strong leadership support and buy-in from senior management. Participants felt that TrACE principles were being embedded into the university’s culture.
- **University as an enabler and connector** – there was considerable collaboration with external partners and integration of TrACE approaches in community projects. The evaluation suggested this was helping to influence regional and national policies and practices.
- **Filling the practice implementation gap** – the evaluation recognised the need for ongoing training and support. A North Wales community of practice had been established to share learning and experiences.
- **Personal impacts** – for those taking part in the evaluation, some described positive changes in their professional practices and personal attitudes. This included increased compassion, understanding, and confidence.

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3 [Wrexham University TrACE Project Evaluation](#)