



Trauma and ACE-informed (TrACE) Organisations Toolkit Evaluation

Summary Report
September 2025



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1. Introduction

Since 2017, ACE Hub Wales's mission has been to enable and support organisations and communities in making changes that make Wales a world leader in preventing, mitigating and tackling Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma and their significant impact. Their aim is to challenge and transform ways of working and create a societal shift to break the long-term cycle of ACEs, adversity and trauma.

Funded by Welsh Government and hosted within Public Health Wales, ACE Hub Wales have worked with the public sector and beyond to ensure that ACEs and their potential impacts across the life course are understood across Wales.

ACE Hub Wales have commissioned MEL Research to conduct an independent evaluation of their Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (TrACE) - Informed Organisations Toolkit (referenced throughout as the TrACE Toolkit). First developed as a concept to support the delivery of the foundations for a Whole School Approach in 2017, the TrACE Toolkit has evolved and improved through further sector specific development; including in Further Education and Substance use services (with additional funding for both provided by the Welsh Government). Over the last six years, the TrACE Toolkit has been supporting organisations, as a practical guide with coproduced resources, to embed trauma and ACE-informed practice.

“The TrACE Toolkit aims to support organisations to reflect on current culture, practice and process and identify activity to implement more trauma-informed and trauma-responsive approaches, resulting in increased ownership for transformational change within their setting. The TrACE Toolkit is not a prescriptive ‘model’ or an ‘intervention’. This is this not about adding “TrACE” to a list of things to do. The Toolkit requires us to assess whether our strategies, policies, processes, services, and people are trauma-informed and ACE aware.”¹

The TrACE Toolkit was identified a key resource to support the implementation of the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework (2022) at an organisational level and is promoted in the Framework document itself. As a result, organisations across Wales and beyond have become aware of the Toolkit which has regularly featured in national and international conferences and is cited in a range of research. This includes evaluations of organisations that were early adopters such as Caredig Housing², sector approaches in Substance Use³ and Further Education⁴ and as part of the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation in Wrexham University⁵.

This evaluation takes the learning from the last six years and explores the impact of the implementation journey with five organisations from different sectors across Wales and the ACE Hub Wales team that have supported them.

1 [Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences \(TrACE\)-Informed Organisations Toolkit Guidance Document](#)

2 [Wisdom's From Housing Report, 2022](#)

3 [Substance Misuse TrACE Toolkit Evaluation Report](#)

4 [Trauma and ACE-Informed Further Education Sector](#)

5 [Evaluation of the Trauma and Adverse Experiences \(TrACE\)-informed university pilot](#)

1.1 Background and context

Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences

In 2015, Public Health Wales published the study of the prevalence of ACEs in Welsh population, which found that over half of children in Wales had experienced one or more ACEs and that higher exposure to ACEs increased risk of negative health outcomes⁶. ACEs are defined as chronic stress on individuals during childhood that arises from the abuse and neglect of children, or from growing up in households where children are routinely exposed to issues such as domestic violence or individuals with alcohol and other substance use problems⁷.

In 2022, ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales co-led the production of an all of society trauma-informed framework for Wales. ***Trauma-Informed Wales - A Societal Approach to Understanding, Preventing and Supporting the Impacts of Trauma and Adversity (Framework)*** was co-produced with people and organisations across Wales, supported by the Welsh Government. The Framework makes the ambition for Wales to become a trauma-informed nation by implementing it across all of society, with individuals, communities, organisations and systems. The Framework provides a definition of trauma-informed approaches for Wales, along with four practice levels and five principles that should underpin all trauma-informed practice in Wales.

The Framework describes trauma as ‘any experience that is unpleasant and causes or has the potential to cause someone distress and/or anxiety. It is important to note that trauma can also be used to refer to the impact of a traumatic event⁸.’

TrACE- informed Organisations Toolkit

An early iteration of the TrACE Toolkit was first developed to support the education sector to adopt a whole school approach to becoming ACE-informed. Between 2017 and 2019, ACE Hub Wales (then named the ACE Support Hub) piloted a three-phase programme of workforce knowledge and skills development and pathway to action planning to truly embed the approach. The approach was evaluated by Public Health Wales in 2019; the report highlighted that whilst the training had a positive impact on staff, there was a requirement to consider alternative methods of action planning which took into account how outcomes can be measured⁹. The evaluation also highlighted that senior leader commitment, support and resource allocation were crucial to effective engagement and sustained changes to the school environment. Recommendations from this evaluation included ensuring that further development of resources were needed that focussed on a stronger integration between a self-assessment tool and action planning as this would help indicate the readiness of the school to become ACE-informed⁹.

Parallel to the engagement with the education sector, and building on its success, Welsh Government funded ACE Hub Wales (ACE Support Hub at the time), to co-develop a Trauma and ACE-informed Organisations Toolkit with the Further Education sector, initially with trailblazer colleges before a sector wide scale up, and with community-based and clinical organisations in the substance misuse sector. Through this period, additional resources were co-created to support each sector, including films showing the positive impact on learners who had been supported by a trauma and ACE-informed approach at college, and films by people with lived experience of substance use who were accessing

6 [ACE Report FINAL \(E\).pdf](#)

7 [Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACE\) Study - PubMed](#)

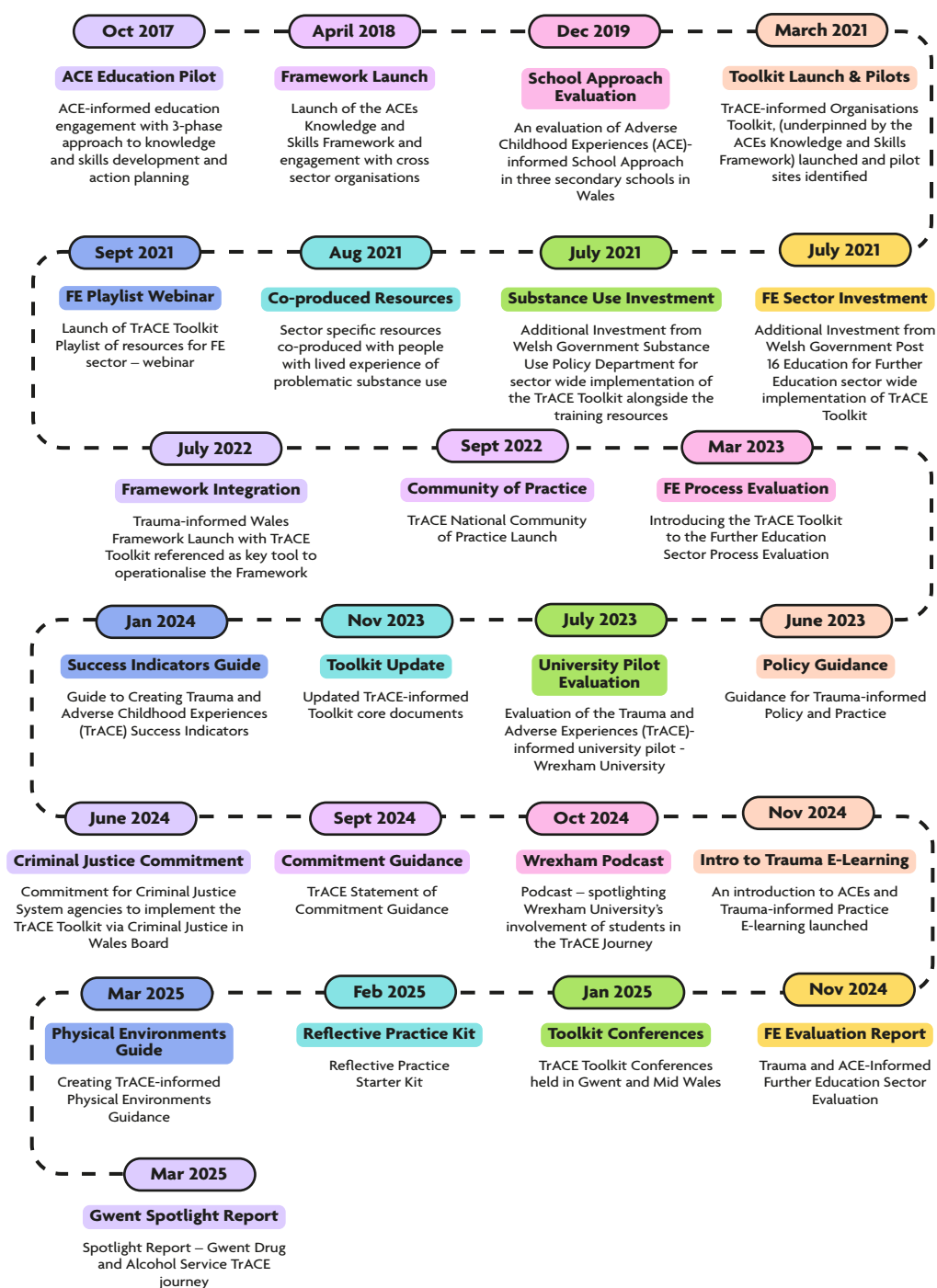
8 [Trauma-Informed-Wales-Framework.pdf](#)

9 [phw.nhs.wales/news/new-survey-shows-both-good-welsh-public-sector-awareness-of-adverse-childhood-experiences-aces-and-opportunities-for-improvement/knowledge-and-awareness-of-adverse-childhood-experiences-in-the-public-service-workforce-in-wales/](#)

support services implementing the TrACE Toolkit.

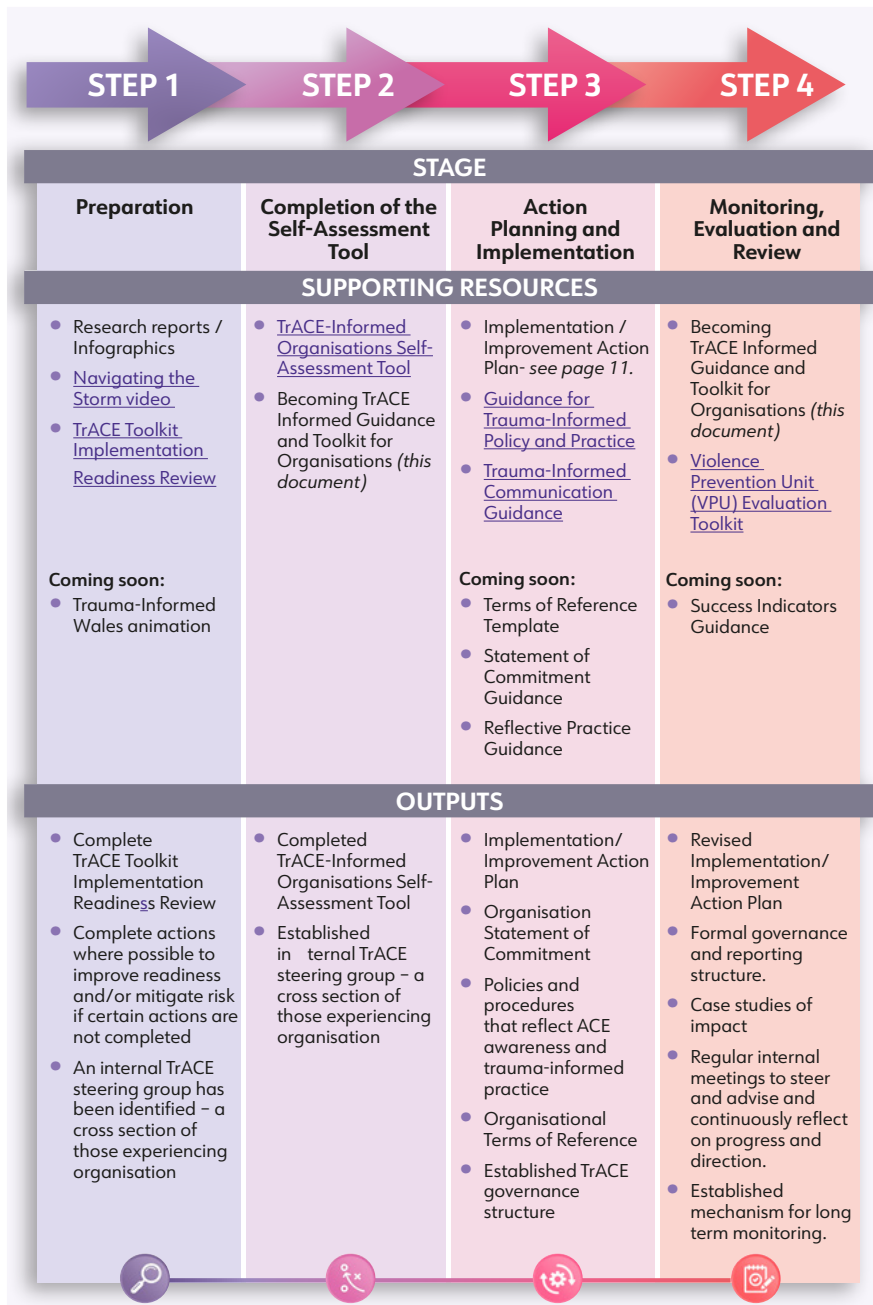
Through engagement and subsequent learning with the Further Education and substance use sectors, and through engagement with individual organisations embedding ACE-informed practice, the TrACE-informed Organisations Toolkit was created. By 2022, when the Trauma-informed Wales Framework was published, organisations in sectors including housing and homelessness, Higher Education and youth justice were also well on their way to implementing the toolkit. They were joined in 2024 by trailblazers in the Criminal Justice System in Wales (the four Welsh police forces, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and His Majesty's courts and Tribunal Service).

TrACE Toolkit Timeline 2017-2024



The stages of the TrACE Toolkit

The TrACE Toolkit is a four-stage reflective process for organisations to use and includes a range of resources to explore **implementation readiness**, complete a **self-assessment**, create an **action plan** to strengthen their organisations commitment to trauma and ACE informed practice, and **monitor and evaluate** the impact. The TrACE Toolkit is universal resource that can be used by different organisations, settings and sectors not just those providing trauma-specific services.



The TrACE Toolkit is centred around six domains which help organisations to focus their reflections and action planning:

Governance, Leadership and Organisation Culture	This domain relates to the overall support for and investment in implementing and sustaining a trauma-informed approach.
Policies and Procedures	This domain relates to how organisational policies and procedures demonstrate commitment to, and enable internal systems to, reflect the foundational values and principles of trauma-informed practice.
Workforce Training and Support	This domain relates to ensuring knowledge and skills within the workforce, enabling trauma-informed principals to be embedded in an ongoing supportive, learning cycle that recognises the importance of the wellbeing and safety of the workforce as set out in the four practice levels.
Physical Environment	This domain relates to what the physical and social environments provide to promote safety and the provision of appropriate resources to achieve this. This is about more than one room being used as a calm space, it considers every space that is used from walking in the front door to the toilets and considers things like promotional materials displayed and accessibility requirements.
Service Design and Delivery	This domain relates to ensuring trauma-informed principles are incorporated in all aspects of service delivery and that there is commitment to sustain this approach in things like funding strategies.
Monitoring and Evaluation	This domain relates to an ongoing monitoring and evaluation process to support the embedding of TrACE approaches, using reflective practice as the underlying principle. Considering how to involve those who experience the organisation in this process is also important, inclusive of those who deliver the service as well as those who receive the service.

1.2 Role of ACE Hub Wales

ACE Hub Wales offers support to organisations with the implementation of the TrACE Toolkit through a range of resources and, based on need, assistance with project management through one-to-one meetings and attendance at senior leadership meetings, which all aim to help organisations get started with the process. In addition to this, a national Community of Practice (CoP) has been in operation since September 2022 which aims to connect a network of interested people together to share promising practice to inspire others on their TrACE Toolkit journey and overcoming shared challenges. This process has enabled the identification of ways to address some of the barriers and challenges posed and the co-production, with ACE Hub Wales, of additional tools to support implementation.

1.3 Evaluation aims

This evaluation was commissioned by ACE Hub Wales to address the following aims:

- To understand how the TrACE Toolkit has been implemented across different organisations – what have services/organisations changed/put into practice?
- To understand what has changed as a result of implementing the TrACE Toolkit – what has been the impact of changes within and across different organisations?
- To understand the role of ACE Hub Wales in supporting and facilitating implementation of the TrACE Toolkit.
- To understand the role of the TrACE Toolkit in the wider context of the national vision and ambition for a Trauma-informed Wales.

In seeking to address these aims, the evaluation team worked with ACE Hub Wales to identify six organisations from different sectors who had been implementing the TrACE Toolkit for some time, the purpose of which was to conduct a ‘deep dive’ into those organisations to explore the changes made and any subsequent impact. While six organisations were originally identified, this reduced to five organisations taking part (due to staff and resource constraints).

The organisations that have taken part in this evaluation include:

- [Barod - A substance use charity](#)
- [Caredig Housing Association](#)
- [Coleg Gwent – Further Education College](#)
- [Flintshire Youth Justice Service](#)
- [Wrexham University](#)

2. Methodology

This evaluation has been conducted using the framework of Realist Evaluation¹⁰. Realist evaluation is a theory-based approach to evaluation which seeks to understand what works, for whom, in what circumstances and in what respects. Table 1 outlines the different forms of data collection that were used to answer the research aims.

Table 1 – Data collection activities

Data collection approach	Number of participants
Gathering data from the five participating organisations – We conducted a scoping review in each of the organisations to understand the changes they had made in relation to the TrACE Toolkit. This process started in April 2024 and continued until December 2024. This was a time intensive process for some organisations, particularly those who did not have a dedicated project manager within their organisation and/or did not have a central way of recording activity. We were provided with varying types of information in this process, including examples of policies, audits of physical environments, presentations, internal reports and feedback data from staff, services users, students and learners.	N/A
Interviews with ACE Hub Wales staff - These interviews were designed to understand their perspectives on how the TrACE Toolkit has been implemented (across all organisations, not just those taking part in this evaluation), the impacts they have seen, their role in supporting implementation and their reflections on the link with the wider Trauma-informed Wales Framework and the future of the TrACE Toolkit. These interviews began in October 2024 and finished in January 2025.	7
Interviews with key staff in the five organisations - We conducted in-depth interviews with people from the five organisations who had been involved in implementing or delivering TrACE Toolkit related activity. The number of people interviewed from each organisation varied from one to nine. Across the sample, respondents had varying degrees of responsibility for the TrACE Toolkit, with only a small minority having it as the main part of their job role.	25
Online survey with wider staff teams in the five organisations – We designed this anonymous online survey to understand if the changes that were being made in the five organisations had filtered down to the experiences of staff (who were not directly involved in the organisational TrACE Toolkit implementation projects). The survey asked staff to indicate their agreement/disagreement with various statements that related to each of the domains. The survey was distributed at the start of February and closed after four weeks. We received 51 responses in total, with responses per organisation ranging from four to 19.	51

¹⁰ Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. (1997) **Realistic Evaluation**. Sage: London

Data collection approach	Number of participants
<p>Ripple Effect Mapping workshops - Two Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) workshops were held in February 2025. One REM session was held online and the other in-person. Representatives from the five organisations and ACE Hub Wales attended (13 in total). Most of the attendees had taken part in interviews or the survey, but some had not. REM is a strengths-based approach that encourages people to reflect on their key achievements, what led to them happening, and what changed as a result. These sessions provided valuable insight into some of the less tangible impacts that staff were starting to see within their organisations and beyond.</p>	13

To protect the anonymity of participants, we have not referred to job roles or organisation names when using quotes. Direct quotes include a reference with their unique identifier (e.g. P1 = Participant 1) and if they were from the ACE Hub Wales or one of the five organisations.

3. Implementing the TrACE Toolkit

In seeking to understand how the TrACE Toolkit has been implemented across different organisations, we considered three key research questions. These questions were designed to unpick what it is about the TrACE Toolkit that leads to change and the wider contexts that help or hinder implementation. The learning from this part of the evaluation is particularly important for other organisations who wish to implement the TrACE Toolkit. Table 2 presents a summary of the key themes that have emerged in relation to the three research questions (with further detail presented below).

Table 2 – Summary of key themes

Key themes	
How does the TrACE Toolkit help organisations to embed trauma and ACEs aware practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The TrACE Toolkit helps to create the right context for embedding trauma-informed approaches.Effective communication supports implementation.Dedicated project management support can be a key enabler.The role of ACE Hub Wales in supporting organisations has been key.
What are the contexts that support implementation of the TrACE Toolkit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Trauma-informed Wales Framework.Alignment with existing frameworks.Local contexts – particularly in North Wales.Commitment to a trauma-informed future within organisations.
What are the contexts that hinder implementation of the TrACE Toolkit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Reluctance to see ‘trauma’ as being the role of the service/organisation.The wider system is not trauma-informed.Potential for changing priorities (e.g. with a new government)Internal contexts (e.g. budgets and time constraints).

3.1 How does the TrACE Toolkit help organisations to embed trauma and ACEs aware practice?

The TrACE Toolkit helps to create the right context

The TrACE Toolkit has been developed to help organisations create the right context for implementation. The Implementation Readiness Review¹¹ outlines a number of key elements that organisations will need to establish in order to implement the TrACE Toolkit effectively. These elements include; the importance of leadership buy-in, a collaborative approach to implementation (with shared responsibility) and acceptance of the long-term nature of culture change. In interviews with staff from the five organisations we found evidence that most of these elements were in place.

11 [TrACE-Toolkit-Implementation-Review-v.2a.pdf](#)

Leadership-buy in is crucial

Participants in the five organisations were unanimous on the importance of leadership buy-in for successful implementation of the TrACE Toolkit:

“Absolutely vital.” (P8, Organisation participant)

“We would 100% agree that it’s very important. It would be very hard if you didn’t have leadership buy in to do this work”. (P10, Organisation participant)

And all described positive experiences of this within their organisations:

“It’s been really good. We had a commitment and sponsor at Deputy Vice Chancellor level very much from the start. She was involved at the beginning stages and she was the one who enabled the TrACE work to begin.” (P17, Organisation participant)

“I think that [leadership buy-in] has been a massive reason for the success of how we’ve been able to throw this out there.” (P19, Organisation participant)

A collaborative approach to implementation is key

One of the key messages in the Implementation Readiness Review is that implementing the TrACE Toolkit should be a collaborative effort (e.g. not relying on one person) and ideally, responsibility should be shared. In relation to the five organisations, there were different experiences of the extent to which this had been achieved in practice. Most participants described a collaborative approach to implementation:

“Everyone takes on little bits and pieces from the working group and does their part—it’s definitely collaborative.” (P11, Organisation participant)

“I think this [collaborative working] is great. I’ve worked in lots of organisations and to try and introduce sort of a matrix way of working. It enables people from different levels and different parts of the organisation to connect on something. So, it’s got this network.” (P8, Organisation participant)



However, others felt there was still work to do in establishing shared responsibility:

“Yes and no. Collaboration has worked well, particularly with teams taking ownership of specific aspects, like adapting training for staff with varied schedules. However, when it comes to shared responsibility, most people still see TrACE as “my thing,” which isn’t ideal..” (P17, Organisation participant)

The TrACE Toolkit must be understood as a long-term commitment to culture change

There was widespread agreement between participants from the five organisations that the TrACE Toolkit is understood as a long-term commitment to culture change in their organisation:

“Absolutely. We very much talk about this as a journey, not a destination. It’s something that is evolving and growing.” (P8, Organisation participant)

“I think it’s something we’re embedding still. Because culture takes longer than a couple of years, isn’t it? It’s something I think we’ve been able to embed to a certain extent, but we’re still continually trying to do that.” (P19, Organisation participant)

Effective communication supports implementation

The Implementation Readiness Review also highlights the importance of communication for effective implementation of the TrACE Toolkit. We found evidence from three of the five organisations that effective communication had been integral to their TrACE Toolkit journey. Some explained that the TrACE Toolkit commitment is no longer just a topic discussed occasionally, but a priority that’s consistently on the agenda in meetings, away days, and communications, ensuring it remains a central focus. Similarly, others explained how regular communication has helped demonstrate the connection between the TrACE Toolkit and other key priorities, particularly as a bridge between equality, diversity, and mental health. One organisation described their approach to communicating the TrACE Toolkit to others in the organisations:

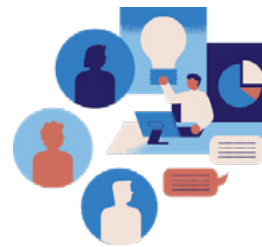


“In our working group, we’ve got sort of people from all levels. So, we’ve got quite a few service managers in there and the directors work closely with the leads of the group as well. So, they always know sort of what’s going on and we do also do quite a lot of communicating to all of our staff what’s going on in the TrACE working group. So, every time we meet, we try and then put an e-mail out to everyone.” (P25, Organisation participant)

“The main challenge has been integrating TrACE into the broader leadership agenda, but regular communication has helped demonstrate its connection to key priorities, particularly as a bridge between equality, diversity, and mental health.” (P8, Organisation participant)

Dedicated project management support can be a key enabler

The five organisations involved in this evaluation had different approaches to implementing the TrACE Toolkit. While two had an internal dedicated project manager to oversee implementation, the others did not. Having a dedicated project manager was described as being particularly helpful with the **action planning process** and **monitoring and evaluation** stages of implementation.



“I think the key [to the Action Plan] is having a really organised Project Manager. So, I think we’ve been really lucky with XXX because she’s just amazing with stuff like that. I think for an organisation who is starting out on the journey, I imagine it might be quite overwhelming because it’s a big process and it’s important as well, and I think sometimes people can feel a bit overwhelmed when they go through all of my policies and procedures.” (P10, Organisation participant)

For those without project management support, some noted that it may have been beneficial, particularly during the **self-assessment process**:

“I think if we had a Project Manager who could oversee it and dedicate the time to it, that would have helped us massively with this.” (P14, Organisation participant)

From the perspective of ACE Hub Wales staff, based on their experience of working with a range of organisations, project managers provide oversight, facilitate regular check-ins, and ensure organisations stay on track through structured planning. In contrast, organisations without this support may still progress but often deviate from the process, making evaluation harder.

“When they don’t have that PM [project management] support... it can lose track... having someone with project management experience ensures longevity.” (P2, ACE Hub Wales participant)

“It’s that sustainability. It’s even just having somebody who’s checking in and finding out where you are and being able to proactively support.” (P6, ACE Hub Wales participant)

The fact that the five organisations took different approaches to implementation, highlights the flexibility of the TrACE Toolkit, yet these responses suggest that a project management approach can be a key enabler to effective implementation.

The role of ACE Hub Wales in supporting organisations has been key

ACE Hub Wales has played a key role in supporting the five organisations (and many others) to start and maintain their TrACE Toolkit journey. This support has taken many forms, including; individualised support throughout the implementation journey, co-producing guidance documents, creating a national Community of Practice and organising events and conferences.

Individualised support throughout the process

Support with self-assessment - While less than half of the interview participants had been directly involved in the self-assessment process, for those who had, most had used ACE Hub Wales as a sounding board;

“We’ve had a really amazing relationship with Ace Hub and they’ve been really supportive and helpful in each step of the journey, particularly at the beginning. So, it would have been around the self-assessment stage, they gave us some really invaluable support and help and advice during that period.” (P10, Organisation participant)

Support with a statement of commitment - Staff from the five organisations explained how ACE Hub Wales provided guidance and shared examples to support in developing their organisational commitment statement. One participant explained how they were initially unclear about what the task should involve, so they approached ACE Hub Wales for support. Others commented on the value of the support received:

“Really helpful and we’ve had lots of discussions in our working group about putting that statement together and we’ve got a sort of a stop gap statement on our website.” (P13, Organisation participant)

- The role of ACE Hub Wales in relation to training is to help organisations design and implement effective training strategies. However, some of the organisations in this evaluation (Barod and Coleg Gwent) were supported with access to a train the trainer package (and other resources) by ACE Hub Wales as a result of additional, sector specific funding from Welsh Government. Other organisations (not in receipt of this additionally funded resources and train the trainer package) described how ACE Hub Wales had helped them to develop sector specific train the trainer package due to an identified gap in the sector for free trauma-aware level training:

“So, you know, they allocated a practitioner, and they allocated a member of staff to help work on a training programme and training resources for youth justice practitioners and staff. And develop that programme and then they helped to deliver.” (P18, Organisation participant)

Co-producing guidance documents to help with implementation

The commitment of ACE Hub Wales to co-producing their tools and guidance documents has been an important factor in making the tools relevant and fit-for-purpose. Indeed, one of the five organisations had worked closely with ACE Hub Wales to develop some of the guidance documents, describing that guidance in very positive terms:

“They’ve been invaluable. I’ve been heavily involved in co-producing those with the ACE Hub.” (P17, Organisation participant)

The value of this co-produced approach to tools and guidance documents can be seen in relation to how participants describe the action planning stage of implementation. While the size of the task and the amount of time required was described by some as daunting initially, the action plan itself was described as helping guide the process:

“When we initially looked at it, we thought, ‘What is this beast?’ But it was a good way to size it down and get the right people from different departments working on their bit.” (P15, Organisation participant)

“It’s really organised in the way it’s set out. It’s easy to understand.” (P23, Organisation participant)

Creating a National Community of Practice (CoP)

The CoP provides an online space where over 100 members (who are already on, or just starting their TrACE Toolkit journey) from various sectors can share learning, present challenges, and collaborate on solutions. The CoP initially emerged out of the Expert Reference Groups that were established as part of sector specific funded projects to embed the TrACE Toolkit in Further Education (FE) and substance use, but have since evolved to include broader membership as interest increased.



From the perspective of participants in the five organisations, ACE Hub Wales has helped to foster communities of practice, creating spaces where organisations can exchange experiences, share challenges, and learn from each other. This approach was valued by the organisations we spoke to:

“I think a key element there is being the connecting in with those different organisations. The national community of practice that ACE Hub have set up is really beneficial there in terms of being able to connect and have those wider conversations.” (P8, Organisation participant)

Organising conferences and events to help implementation

Several participants described being involved in attending and presenting their TrACE Toolkit progress at events organised by ACE Hub Wales:

“We’ve contributed to external conferences, we’ve developed video presentations and also have been pleased to attend and present at a number of ACE conferences, which again has been really good.” (P8, Organisation participant)

With some describing the value of these opportunities for gaining a broader perspective:

“We’ve been involved in delivering plenty of presentations. So super useful. It gives you that strategic picture and brings it all together.” (P17, Organisation participant)

3.2 What are the contexts that support implementation of the TrACE Toolkit?

The Trauma-informed Wales Framework

Most (but not all) participants in the five organisations were familiar with the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework. Those who were, referenced the fact that the TrACE Toolkit is aligned with commitments at the national level:

“My understanding is the framework creates a more consistent kind of coherent strategy around trauma in terms of implementing it across Wales, and across the way that everyone works.” (P26, Organisation participant)

Furthermore, participants who were familiar with the Trauma-informed Wales Framework described the TrACE Toolkit as being aligned with it and providing practical steps to support organisations to achieve the goals it has set out.

“I would say it’s a practical tool that reflects and enables you to take the strategic view of the framework and put it into action.” (P17, Organisation participant)

3.3 Alignment with existing frameworks

Some organisations noted how other strategies that align with the TrACE Toolkit approach can support implementation, giving the example of the ‘Child First’ approach in Youth Justice Services which means putting children at the heart of the youth justice system¹².

“The child first approach. Obviously, that’s sort of becoming more and more embedded within the service. We are starting to see it sort of percolate out into other agencies. So, it’s just, the terminology is slightly different, but in our head the principles should be the same, so we’re starting to see that kind of filtering out to other agencies as well.” (P18, Organisation participant)

Similarly, for Coleg Gwent, the TrACE Toolkit has supported their commitment to being ‘Ready, Respectful, Safe’ which is an education-based approach to creating a safe learning environment and has been adopted in schools and college across the country¹³.

“The ready, respectful, safe policy of our college. Yes, supports a trauma-informed approach.” (P23, Organisation participant)

Local contexts – North Wales

It is important to highlight the context in North Wales where organisations including Wrexham University and Flintshire Youth Justice Service (who took part in this evaluation) operate. North Wales has its own TrACE Community of Practice which brings together organisations from a wide range of sectors, including education, health, policing and youth justice. There is a strong commitment to cross-sector working and collaboration in North Wales which has been evidenced by the number of

¹² [What is Child First? - Youth Justice Resource Hub](#)

¹³ [HOME | WhenTheAdultsChange](#)

initiatives where organisations work together to embed trauma-informed practice across the wider system (including working with North Wales Police and local schools).

Commitment to a trauma-informed future within organisations

All organisations described feeling positive that the TrACE Toolkit would continue to be embedded within their organisations. The vast majority felt that the changes they had implemented were sustainable:

*“Definitely, because we’ve tried to make it a cultural shift rather than an initiative.”
(P19, Organisation participant)*

Thinking to the future, some envision an organisation that is truly reformed, ensuring that conditions are created where people can thrive, while others describe a more empathetic approach to working with people; fostering a greater understanding and changing how they think and act in order to help others do the same:

“I think we will have an organisation, like a staff group who have not just knowledge about TrACE and trauma, but the skills and the confidence to be able to work in a trauma-informed way from top to bottom. So, CEO all the way down to our volunteers.” (P26, Organisation participant)

3.4 What are the contexts that hinder implementation of the TrACE Toolkit?

Reluctance to see ‘trauma’ as being the role of the service/organisation

In one of the five organisations there was a minority view that not all departments had bought in to TrACE Toolkit with some reportedly feeling they couldn’t see the relevance to their job role. This was thought to be especially prevalent amongst staff who had been there a long time:

“It’s quite difficult to change approaches for people that have been here a long time, they are set in their ways.” (P22, Organisation participant)

The wider system is not trauma-informed

Some organisations raised the issue that while they are working to embed trauma-informed practice, the system they work within is not. This was particularly the case for organisations who work alongside the criminal justice, housing or social care systems. Essentially, if the wider system does not understand trauma and ACEs, then the impact that individual organisations can achieve is limited.

“I’d like to see some of the changes more nationally in terms of actually, you know, policy and legislation becoming more trauma informed. I think there’s a conflict there for us. I would like to see strategic leaders and politicians to become more trauma informed.” (P18, Organisation participant)

Helping to embed the TrACE Toolkit in the wider system is a key aim of the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework and evidence from this evaluation suggests it is a key priority for some of the organisations we spoke to.

Potential for changing priorities

Some participants in the five organisations noted a potential shift in priorities, raising the question as to whether changes in government priorities could affect the agenda:

“We did have a government change and I suppose that’s kind of led to some uncertainty around what that might mean for Wales. And this agenda, will it be a priority? Will that affect policies on a national level? How are things going to evolve?”
(P26, Organisation participant)

Internal contexts

It was noted that internal issues have the potential to impact the effective implementation of the TrACE Toolkit within organisations – mostly in the way of staff turnover and limited resources.

“And then the other kind of element is just staff turnover, I suppose the nature of the beast is that people come into the working group and go out of the working group. Thankfully we had a consistent core of people.” (P26, Organisation participant)



“Funding and budgets can potentially hinder how much time, how much capacity people have got to drive this work forward” (P13, Organisation participant)

4. Impact of the TrACE Toolkit – A summary of changes made.

Governance, Leadership and Organisation Culture



- Barod and Wrexham University have a 'Statement of Commitment' in place.
- All interview participants described leadership buy-in for the TrACE Toolkit in their organisations.
- Interview participants described a commitment in their organisation to long-term culture change.

Policies and Procedures



- Some organisations had a **set process for reviewing policies** (Wrexham University), others had a more informal approach (Caredig).
- A number of policies had been revised in line with a TrACE-informed approach (e.g. Wrexham University, Coleg Gwent, Caredig).
- Feedback from staff (in interviews and the REM sessions) suggest the new policies are **changing practice on the ground** (e.g. the Behaviour Policy at Coleg Gwent).

Workforce Training and Support



- All organisations have provided **training or development opportunities for staff** related to trauma and ACEs.
- Where available, feedback from this training suggests participants have **improved awareness and understanding** and have made changes to practice.

Service Design and Delivery



- **All organisations** described making **changes to how they work with students, learners or service users** in line with a trauma-informed approach.
- Barod has incorporated TrACE-informed lens into their **commissioning process**.

Physical Environment



- Barod have created an **audit tool** which has helped them to make a number of positive changes in their settings.
- Coleg Gwent have **surveyed learners** to understand the changes that need to be made.
- Wrexham University are in the planning stages for changes to physical environments, working with US based **Trauma-informed Design**.

Monitoring and Evaluation



- **All organisations** were able to provide some **evidence of impact**.
- Some organisations had carried out **evaluations of their TrACE Toolkit journey** (Wrexham University and Caredig)
- **Most organisations** were working on **developing their frameworks for monitoring and evaluation**.

5. Good practice examples



Wrexham University have aligned the TrACE Toolkit with their civic mission initiative. 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. Importantly, Wrexham University have created the structures for a collaborative approach to implementing the TrACE Toolkit, bringing together colleagues from across the University. The impact of this shared governance structure can be seen in the scale of change achieved, including the increasing role of students as advocates for the TrACE approach.



As a result of implementing the TrACE Toolkit, **Coleg Gwent** has changed its Learner Disciplinary Policy (May 2021) to a 'Behavior' policy (March 2024). The Behaviour Policy of March 2024 uses restorative approaches rather than punishment to address negative behaviour ensuring that all learners are treated fairly, are shown respect and are supported to develop life skills for learning. The behaviour expectations are linked to the three college values of 'Be Respectful, Be Ready, Be Safe.'



Caredig have created an area which has information and guidance documents to support and develop staff understanding and to support the people that use their services. These include:

- In-depth guides & manuals which can be used to support staff to work through various subject areas (such as mental health) with the people that use their services.
- Mind guidance booklets on a range of mental health conditions.
- Motivational Interviewing guide.
- A video called 'RESILIENCE - The biology of stress and the science of hope' which gives insight into adverse childhood experiences (ACES).
- In addition, a 'Happy Health Staff' initiative has been embedded in organisational activities.



Wrexham University have worked hard to involve students in their TrACE Toolkit journey. In 2021 they established a student sub-group who participated in Freshers events. By 2022 this had expanded to over 60 students who were delivering workshops and it was decided to create the TrACE Champion role.



Barod created an audit form to help review their physical spaces. The audit includes perspectives from staff, service users and volunteers. As a result, they have made a number of changes:

- In Cwm Taf Morgannwg, a grant was secured from Keep Wales Tidy to improve the allotment space in Bridgend and the office entry system and reception area were improved to be more relaxing and welcoming.
- In Dyfed, office environments have been improved for service users, making them more accessible, comfortable, friendly and more informal.
- In Gwent N-gage, changes have been made to the main office base, including a redesign of the large drop-in room (now 'The Hwb') and smaller 1:1 rooms.



Flintshire YJS use a range of methods to monitor and evaluate their work:

- The Youth Justice Service (YJS) Senior Manager undertakes annual staff assessments with the YJS Team to assess the team's thoughts and feelings on the service and serves as a 'health check' on operational and strategic activities.
- YJS has also attempted to increase feedback from children and young people. At the end of the child or young person's involvement with YJS, they asked them to fill in a questionnaire commenting on their experience of YJS.

6. Evidencing the impact of changes made

There were two key ways we were able to evidence impact of the various changes described above. The first was through data collected by the organisations themselves, and the second was through an anonymous online survey distributed by MEL Research in February 2025.

6.1 Evidence of impact from the organisations

Staff report positive experiences of being recruited and working for the organisations.

“The extensive preparation material significantly benefitted me, as it alleviated much of the anxiety typically associated with attending interviews.” (Barod employee)

“I feel very safe in my role, there’s been lots going on here. Things have been busy. I feel really supported.” (Caredig employee)

Students, learners and services users report feeling safe and supported.

“Everyone had a good understanding – I felt understood and staff saw the dark side of addiction that was affecting me” (Barod service user)

“The best thing about living here is my room. I feel safe living here.” (Caredig service user)

“I think you’ve been brilliant. You’ve listened to me and I don’t think anyone else does.” (Young person, Flintshire YJS)



At Coleg Gwent, 99% of students felt the college was a safe place to study (2023/24)

People who have received training and development related to trauma and ACE-informed practice report improved understanding and changes to their practice.

- At Barod, 79% of staff report a good or excellent understanding of trauma and ACEs in 2024 compared to 60% in 2023. When asked how confident they feel in delivering a trauma-informed approach, 71% of staff felt ‘mostly’ or ‘fully’ confident in 2024, compared to 43% in 2023.
- At Coleg Gwent, feedback from their phase 1 training (based on 45 responses) suggests 69% of staff scored the usefulness of the session at 100%. A further 29% of staff scored the usefulness of the session at 80-90%. Overall, 69% declared that they would definitely make changes to their professional practice as a consequence of the training.
- At Wrexham University, students who attended training to become a TrACE champion felt it prepared them well 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.” (TrACE student champion)

6.2 Evidence of impact from the online survey

We received 51 responses to the anonymous online survey. Responses to the survey suggest implementation of the TrACE Toolkit is contributing to positive change across the six domains.

Understanding and awareness

Staff demonstrate a good understanding of trauma and ACEs, suggesting they are not just theoretical concepts but are personally understood and professionally embedded.

“The term “trauma-informed” refers to an approach that recognises, understands, and responds to the effects of trauma in individuals’ lives. It ensures that services, policies, and interactions are designed to avoid re-traumatization and promote safety, empowerment, and healing.” (Survey respondent 166)

“Understanding someone’s background and experiences of adverse behaviours, as a child and how this may have affected their behaviours and mental health.” (Survey respondent 100)

Governance, leadership and organisational culture

The majority of respondents (84%) agreed or strongly agreed that they know who is responsible for ensuring their organisation follows its trauma-informed and ACE-aware commitment. Nearly 9 in 10 respondents (88%) felt that directors and leaders understand trauma and ACEs, indicating a strong foundation of awareness at senior levels. However, while 79% of respondents agreed they are given the opportunity to be involved in organisational decision-making more broadly, only 55% said they had been involved specifically in work or planning related to being trauma-informed and ACE aware. Encouragingly, 89% of those who were involved felt their contribution was valued.

Policies and procedures

A combined 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organisation’s policies are fair and transparent. Respondents also expressed strong confidence in their organisation’s commitment to wellbeing. 88% percent agreed that organisational policies support the wellbeing of staff, while an even higher 96% felt that these policies promote the wellbeing of clients, service users, or students. This suggests that trauma-informed principles are being embedded not only in frontline practice but also at a policy level.



96%
agreed they
support clients/
service users/
students'
wellbeing

Workforce training and development

A combined 76% of staff said they had received training on trauma and/or ACEs, with nearly half (47%) having attended more than once. The majority of those who received training found it valuable, with 88% describing it as “highly” or “mostly” useful for their role.

“I have changed the way I run appointments, and have created a space to see young people that is trauma informed” (Survey respondent 159)

Responses suggested that training led to:



Increased awareness
of trauma, vicarious
trauma and triggers



Adjusted
communication styles



More empathetic,
person-centred
support plans



Greater emphasis on
personal reflection
and self-care

Physical environment

Almost all respondents said they feel physically safe at work (98%) and believe their colleagues do too (94%). A further 91% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that clients feel safe on the premises, suggesting a shared perception of safety across groups.

When asked about the design of physical spaces, 78% of respondents agreed that their organisation's environments are welcoming, and 78% felt the spaces reflect that the organisation cares about the people who use them. However, only 63% agreed that the spaces are accessible to everyone, highlighting potential gaps in inclusivity.

Service design and delivery

98% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are trusted to use their skills to adapt the support they provide. All respondents felt encouraged to consider individual needs (100%) and nearly all said they are supported to offer choice in how they work with clients (98%). While overall confidence in trauma-informed practice was high, responses indicated slightly lower confidence when it came to navigating sensitive conversations. 78% of respondents said they felt confident asking about trauma or ACEs, though a much higher 96% felt reassured that there were others in their organisation who could support disclosures if needed.

100%
felt encouraged
to consider
individual needs

Monitoring and evaluation

Respondents report a generally positive culture of feedback and learning within their organisations. Most notably, 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organisation has a culture of continuous learning and improvement. This reflects a strong foundation for trauma-informed development, where staff feel that growth, reflection, and adaptation are valued.

6.3 Evidence of impact from the Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) session

At the in-person REM session with Flintshire YJS and Wrexham University, we identified the extent to which they were working with external partners as part of their TrACE Toolkit journey. It was clear that in North Wales, in particular, organisations were working together to raise awareness of the importance of a trauma and ACE informed approach at the wider system level. This aligns directly with one of the key objectives in the TrACE Toolkit self-assessment document under service design and delivery:

“There is whole system consideration in terms of the interface with other services, both internal to the organisation and across partner agencies to ensure that there is a mutual understanding of trauma-informed practice and ACE awareness”¹⁴.



In respect of Flintshire YJS, this included connections with Theatr Clwyd (a regional arts centre), Coleg Cambria, Wrexham University and the YJS Executive Management Board. These connections were described as stemming from their TrACE Toolkit action plan but had different functions. For example, Wrexham University have been working with Flintshire YJS to provide peer support and learning, training for staff, and using academic insight to help improve the use of language in court reports. Their REM map outlines how changes in the use of language in court reports will hopefully impact on decision-making, and ultimately lead to better outcomes for children (e.g. fewer custodial sentences).

In respect of Wrexham University, their decision to align the TrACE Toolkit with their civic mission work has resulted in connections and collaborations with varying organisations. Alongside implementation of the TrACE Toolkit, they have developed their civic mission approach, resulting in the North Wales Civic Engagement Partnership – an outcome of which was a child poverty conference organised for May 2025. Moreover, funding generated through the civic mission led to the creation of an animation, named Navigating the Storm, to help explain what trauma and ACE-informed practice is about. This led to additional impacts, including for the students involved in developing the animation (building their skills and giving them a platform) but also for sharing the message about trauma and ACEs with a wider audience. As a result of their work with the TrACE Toolkit, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales asked Wrexham University to act as a ‘beacon’ project for other universities. This led to the university becoming involved in a new initiative, the Children’s University, which is a scheme that encourages and rewards young people for taking part in extracurricular and volunteering activities in their schools, their community and online, in order to raise aspirations, provide young people with new experiences, skills, friends and passions.

These examples highlight how implementing the TrACE Toolkit (for Wrexham University and Flintshire YJS) has involved collaborating with other organisations and led to ‘ripple’ outcomes beyond the aims of the TrACE Toolkit.

¹⁴ [TrACE-Toolkit-Self-Assessment-Tool-Eng-2b-PDF.pdf](#)

7. Conclusions and recommendations

This report has demonstrated that the five organisations have made considerable progress in changing how they work to align with the TrACE Toolkit. Moreover, evidence of impact suggests this is filtering down to staff, students, learners and service users. Below we highlight some of the key learning from this evaluation and present some recommendations for future implementation of the TrACE Toolkit.

7.1 Key learning - The process of implementing the TrACE Toolkit

The evaluation found clear evidence that the first stage of the TrACE Toolkit, the Implementation Readiness Review, had been effective in helping organisations create the right context for implementation, with all organisations securing leadership buy-in and a long-term commitment to culture change, and most feeling they had a collaborative approach to implementation and effective communication. Reflecting on the self-assessment and action planning stages of implementation, evidence from this evaluation suggests that while organisations felt they were daunting initially, the step-by-step processes in the Toolkit, alongside a project management approach and support from ACE Hub Wales were all described as supporting effective implementation. With regard to monitoring and evaluation, this was the stage that most organisations struggled with, however, project management was again identified as a key enabler.

7.2 Key learning - The impact of the TrACE Toolkit

This evaluation demonstrates that the TrACE Toolkit is having an impact in organisations across the six domains. Not only are organisations making changes in line with the TrACE Toolkit, but they are starting to see evidence of those changes impacting positively on staff, students, learners and services users. Moreover, some organisations are making progress in changing the wider system, working with other sectors to help them work towards being trauma-informed (particularly in North Wales). However, it is important to highlight that robust evidence of impact relating to specific changes or activities (collected by organisations) remains limited. Below are a number of recommendations for improving evidence collection.



7.3 Key learning - The role of ACE Hub Wales

This evaluation has demonstrated the vital role played by ACE Hub Wales in supporting organisations to make meaningful change in line with the TrACE Toolkit (as described above). They support organisations to understand and approach the TrACE Toolkit in a way that is most likely lead to sustainable change. ACE Hub Wales have worked hard to support organisations in a way that is sustaining in the long-term, for example by co-designing resources and facilitating communities of practice.

7.4 Gaps in the evaluation - Monitoring and evaluation

During the course of this evaluation, we have identified that monitoring and evaluation remains a challenge for organisations implementing the TrACE Toolkit. The evaluation team worked closely with the five organisations to understand the changes they had made as a result of implementing the TrACE Toolkit and the impact of those changes. During that process it became clear that while some organisations had a central record of the six domains and the changes that had been made, others did not. This resulted in considerable effort on behalf of those individuals to liaise with other departments and collate the required information. It also highlighted that changes were not necessarily being communicated across departments, potentially affecting their impact.



Recommendation 1:

An internal central repository for TrACE Toolkit activities within organisations

Based on the challenges that some organisations faced in collating evidence of TrACE Toolkit related activity, it is recommended that all organisations create an internal central repository for keeping a record of their activity (ideally on a shared drive or Intranet area), where different departments can contribute with updates regarding their areas of responsibility. This would also allow progress to be reported more easily (for example, to senior leaders or as part of an evaluation).

Recommendation 2:

Embed Monitoring and Evaluation into the domains

In order to help incorporate monitoring and evaluation into their planning, additional support for organisations to understand potential outputs and outcomes of their activities is recommended. For example, encouraging organisations to consider ‘what change do you hope to see as a result of this action?’ and ‘how can you capture evidence of impact?’ If an organisation is planning to launch a training programme regarding ACEs and their aim is to train 100 staff in three months, asking them to reflect on what change they expect to see as a result of the training is important. Do they want a high satisfaction rate from the training, or do they want to know that their staff have understood the content and applied it in practice? Their answer to the first question will determine the type of evidence that can be collected. Organisations might find a template example helpful, particularly for inspiration regarding impact and forms of evidence. It is important to note that ACE Hub Wales have produced a guidance document for developing success indicators, but none of the organisations we worked with on this evaluation provided evidence that they had developed their own. The evaluation team has created list of potential outputs and indicators related to the six domains (available in the full report). This will help strengthen the understanding of how to complete the Action Plan which includes identifying ‘outcomes’ for each identified action.

Recommendation 3: Understanding the value of the TrACE Toolkit

An initial aim of this evaluation was to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the TrACE Toolkit. While the feasibility of doing this was explored, it became clear that it would not be possible, largely because it is very data intensive, requiring a defined counter-factual, measures for relevant outcomes and data on intervention costs¹⁵. It was clear from working with organisations that data at this level of granularity either did not exist or would have been too challenging to gather. There are also criticisms of cost-benefit analysis that it can be reductive and can exclude intangible values when they are too difficult to measure in monetary terms¹⁶.



However, based on the evaluation of the TrACE Toolkit, the evaluation team suggest a Value for Investment¹⁷ approach may be feasible. Value for Investment (Vfi) isn't a method – it's an evaluation system developed to bring clarity to using existing methods and tools to evaluate how well resources are used, the extent to which value created justifies the resources invested, and how more value can be generated from investments in policies or programmes.

The Vfi system is underpinned by four key principles:

- It is **interdisciplinary** (drawing on evaluation and economics),
- Uses **mixed methods** (integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence),
- Employs **evaluative reasoning** (interpreting evidence through explicit criteria and standards),
- It is **participatory** (involving stakeholders in co-design and analysis).

Recommendation 4: Co-produce an evaluation framework which includes Vfi

Based on the findings of this evaluation, it is recommended that a co-produced evaluation framework for the TrACE Toolkit is created, which can be used by any organisation using the TrACE Toolkit. Part of this would include the creation of Value for Investment criteria to help answer the following questions:

1. How well have the resources been used?
2. What value has been created?
3. Does the value created justify the resource use?
4. How can the resource use be improved?
5. How fair is the distribution of resources amongst different groups

Organisations would then understand what information they would need to keep track of in order evidence the value of the TrACE Toolkit. This could be done on a pilot basis with some of the more established organisations to test the feasibility of the approach.

15 Schiff, A. (2024). Data and information for economic evaluation of social investments. Schiff Consulting. <https://www.schiff.co.nz/en/resources/data-for-economic-evaluation/>.

16 Adler, M.D., Posner, E.A. (2006). New Foundations of Cost-Benefit Analysis. Harvard University Press. ISBN 9780674022799.

17 [200219-Julian-King-VFM-web.pdf](#)

Appendix – Case studies of the five organisations in this case evaluation

TrACE CASE STUDY: Barod

Barod is committed to providing high-quality, free and confidential support and guidance to anyone who is affected by drug or alcohol use, either their own or someone else's; and raising awareness about the ways everyone can help to reduce the harm caused by substance use. Barod offers a wide range of services in South East and West Wales, including; young person's services, friends & family support, group work, drop-in, harm reduction activities and relapse prevention.

The Barod vision is to be recognised by its key stakeholders as the leading provider of innovative and quality services within the drug and alcohol field. Barod is guided by both National strategy and international evidence when they develop their services.

Changes made in line with the TrACE Toolkit

Governance, leadership and organisation culture



Statement of commitment

"Barod is an organisation that recognises our staff and service users may be people who have experienced/are experiencing trauma and/or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). We acknowledge that this is only one aspect of their identity and does not define them. You will find that Barod's workforce are equipped with the skills and knowledge to reduce the impact of trauma and re-traumatisation. Our staff use compassionate, inclusive approaches to ensure relationships are safe and nurturing, allowing people to heal, build resilience and focus on their strengths. Barod's culture is one of choice, collaboration and empowerment to prevent, mitigate and tackle ACEs and the impact of these on our future generations."

In their Annual Report 2023-24, Barod's values are stated as integrity, empathy, positive attitude and adaptability. Their mission is to provide support, information and advocacy to those who are vulnerable and marginalised as a result of their own or someone else's drug and/or alcohol use, in order to improve their physical, social and emotional well-being.

Interviews with Barod staff suggest it is recognised that being trauma-informed is a constant part of the organisational culture, with it being consistently on the agenda in meetings, away days, and communications, ensuring it remains a central focus. Many initiatives have been implemented to ensure all staff understand the organisation's commitment to working in a trauma-informed way.

Policies and procedures



In their TrACE Annual Report 2023-24, it is stated that trauma and ACE-informed practice has been a priority for the organisation, becoming embedded into key organisational objectives and work strands, and considered in the review of all policies and procedures. In the Ripple Effect Mapping (REM)¹ session, staff highlighted that policies had been shortened to help staff use them more effectively.

Interviews with Barod staff indicated that the most significant change has been the overhaul of the recruitment process, led by their Recruitment and Volunteer Coordinator. This includes making the process more trauma-informed, with clearer communication, interview preparation, and accommodations, resulting in a less stressful and more inclusive experience. Some staff we interviewed told us that feedback from candidates has been overwhelmingly positive, noting the kinder, more supportive approach.

For current staff members, the shift to a trauma-informed approach includes an open-door policy, which enables staff to highlight access issues or voice concerns, which are then escalated to relevant teams. It was also mentioned that HR are now involved in the TrACE working group and are working on revising sick and compassionate leave policies.

Workforce training and support



In Barod's TrACE Annual Report 2023-24, more detail is provided on the revised recruitment process which has been reviewed through a trauma-informed lens with several changes being made, including:

- Job descriptions in advertising have been condensed to make them less intimidating for candidates
- Pre-interview information has been revised to include directions of how to get to the location of the interview along with the contact details of the hiring manager
- Candidates can now preview the interview questions at the start of their interview and make notes to support their answers

In addition, Barod's approach to training has shifted to be more trauma-informed, focusing on preparing participants for sensitive topics and offering support if needed. There have been challenges with training rollout, but more specialist training has been incorporated into the workforce development programme over the past six months. E-learning is being developed with a trauma-informed training package made mandatory for staff.

¹ 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.

Physical environment



Barod have made significant progress in this domain. They have created an audit form to help review their physical spaces. The audit includes perspectives from staff, service users and volunteers. As a result, they have made several changes:

- In Cardiff, an environmental audit was conducted with a group of young people, which resulted in the base being redecorated.
- In Cwm Taf Morgannwg, a grant was secured from Keep Wales Tidy to improve the allotment space in Bridgend and the office entry system and reception area were improved to be more relaxing and welcoming.
- In Dyfed, office environments have been improved for service users making them more accessible, comfortable, friendly and more informal.
- In Gwent N-gage, changes have been made to the main office base, including a redesign of the large drop-in room now 'The Hwb') and smaller 1:1 rooms.

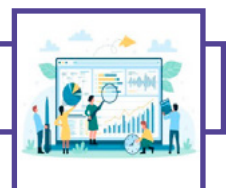
During interviews with Barod staff it was stated that despite differences in service types and building requirements, each service has made positive changes, and the development of the audit tool is considered one of their biggest achievements. Several mentioned fewer locked doors and a more welcoming reception, along with fidget tools, a fish tank, a 'Zen' room, a big drop-in room, lighting, and better signage. In the REM session, staff also mentioned the free necessities that are provided in communal spaces.

Service design and delivery



Barod have incorporated TrACE into their bidding process, where every contract bid now references trauma-informed care throughout, not just at the end. This ensures that trauma awareness is embedded in service delivery from the start. During the recent recommissioning process for services in Gwent, trauma-informed practices were fully embedded into the bid responses.

Monitoring and evaluation



Barod have systems in place to collect data from a range of sources:

- Service users provide feedback via the Service User Final Thoughts form.
- Barod collected baseline data with staff regarding the understanding of a trauma-informed approach, the level of confidence in delivering a trauma-informed approach, and the importance of the organisation upholding this approach. This data was collected in September 2023 and repeated in December 2024.
- A Physical Environment Audit Tool has been developed for staff to fill in, which asks for their detailed comments about the look of the service through the client's or staff member's eyes depending on the area being audited. They are asked to walk through the building, experiencing the initial reception and interview process, as well as staff induction and working practices, documenting their thoughts and feelings at each stage. The audit covers detailed questions about the outside of the building, point of entry, reception area, interview spaces, group/

meeting spaces, needle exchange, exit from the building, staff office area, kitchen and break facilities and toilet facilities.

- During staff development days, Barod gather feedback on changes using QR codes for data collection, which informs TrACE steering group decisions.
- Service managers are also encouraged to include TrACE in their contract reporting for added accountability.

Evidence of Impact

Service user feedback

The Service User Final Thoughts Forms Report, saw 100% of the sample (37 service users) agreeing that they would recommend the service to someone else; that it was easy to find the service; and that they could access the service in their preferred way. Detailed comments about the quality of the service included:

100%
of service users
would recommend
the service to
someone else

“Everyone had a good understanding – I felt understood and staff saw the dark side of addiction that was affecting me” (Service user)

“Feel like the service helped her see things in a different way just knowing someone was there at the end of the phone helped immensely, thanks so much.” (Family member)

Staff feedback

New recruitment process

Feedback on the new recruitment and induction process has been positive. In the Welcome Survey, 32 staff were interviewed, and the job application form was scored highly (4.66), with 75% agreeing that they received an interview sheet prior to interview, containing information on where to go and what to expect.

They were given time at the start of the interview to look at the questions (88%) and given the opportunity to request any adjustments that they required throughout the interview (97%). The communications throughout the recruitment process were highly praised (4.66) and once in the job role, the vast majority were satisfied with the quality of the induction, equipment, sickness procedures, booking holidays, claiming expenses and arranging a 4-week review.

Similarly, during the REM session, staff described how the changes they had made to their recruitment process, including pre-interview phone calls and familiarisation videos had led to increased attendance at interviews. They described an occasion where a new member of staff (who had been through the new process) was working with a service user who was very anxious about

“The extensive preparation material significantly benefitted me, as it alleviated much of the anxiety typically associated with attending interviews.”

attending the building and wasn't going to make their appointment. The staff member decided to share the familiarisation video and instructions of how to get there with the service user, which led to them keeping their appointment.

Improved understanding of trauma and ACEs

Based on data collected by Barod, staff report improved understanding of TrACE, with 79% of staff reporting a good or excellent understanding in 2024 compared to 60% in 2023. Similarly, when asked how confident they feel in delivering a trauma-informed approach, 71% of staff felt good or fully confident in 2024, compared to 43% in 2023.

TrACE CASE STUDY: Caredig

Caredig is a nonprofit registered social landlord (RSL) based in Swansea, established in 1975 to meet the housing needs of families, older and more vulnerable people. They manage over 2,900 high-quality, affordable homes and provide a range of services to people and communities across Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Neath and Port Talbot, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire.

Their mission, vision and values are to put people and relationships at the heart of everything they do, creating homes where people can feel safe and secure, whilst building thriving communities where people can flourish. They aim to create strong, vibrant and resilient communities where people can live active, fulfilling, lives - living independently and safely.

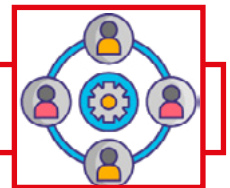
Changes made in line with the TrACE Toolkit

Governance, leadership and organisation culture



In the 360 Support, Planning, Procedure and Guidance document (Aug 2023) Caredig explain how they aim to provide a psychologically, trauma and ACE-informed service by developing strong relationships with the people that use their services. There is an emphasis on quality conversations which are sensitive to trauma and non-judgemental. Simply put, they are looking to get to a place that *'enables people providing and receiving services to share power and responsibility, and to work together in equal, reciprocal and caring relationships'*.

Workforce training and support



Caredig have provided 64 new staff with TrACE related training via their induction, which is online and involves a discussion with their line manager. They have also provided ACE/trauma training to a further 73 staff, mainly from the care and support team but also wider teams from across the organisation.

In addition to formal training, Caredig have created an area on their Intranet which has information and guidance documents to support and develop staff understanding and to support the people that use their services. These include:

- **Node Link Maps** which are clear guides to walk through supporting people who are having various challenges, developing strategies or setting goals amongst others. They guide the conversation with a service user and really help to structure the 1-2-1 session around a particular topic

- **In Depth Guides & Manuals** which can be used to support staff to work through various subject areas (such as mental health) with the people that use their services
- **Mind Guidance Booklets** on a range of mental health conditions
- **Motivational Interviewing guide**
- **A video** called 'The biology of stress and the science of hope' which gives insight into adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).
- In addition, a '**Happy Health Staff**' initiative has been embedded in organisational activities.

Physical environment



Caredig recognise the importance of physical spaces. In the 360 Support, Planning, Procedure and Guidance document (Aug 2023) it states that *'the physical environment and social spaces in our supported housing services need to inspire the health and well-being of the service users that live there alongside providing a sense of safety and control'*.

Interviews with Caredig staff suggest an awareness of decor and environment ensuring that people get space to have private conversations. Additionally, there has been a shift from shared housing to more self-contained units with communal areas.

Service design and delivery



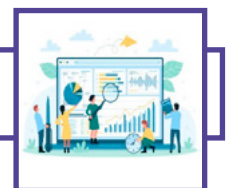
In the 360 Support, Planning, Procedure and Guidance document (Aug 2023), guidance about how to conduct conversations with tenants is outlined with reference to Social Care Wales. The 5 stages of a good conversation are given as:

- Open engaging questions
- Active listening
- Open exploratory questions
- Information exchange (if appropriate)
- Summary and actions – home in on main issues

Practical examples of questions that staff could ask are highlighted in the Appendix of the report and are designed to encourage behaviour that shifts staff from focusing on *'what's wrong with you?'* but rather explores *'what's happened to you?'*

In addition, in interviews with Caredig staff, one respondent stated that there is a growing awareness of the necessity of tools being made available to enable people to fix themselves and build their resilience.

Monitoring and evaluation



In the 360 Support, Planning, Procedure and Guidance document (Aug 2023), reference is made to 'feedback informed treatment' which means they can track and demonstrate real outcomes for people that are statistically viable. This data means Caredig can assess what is and is not working on an organisational level as well as a 1-2-1 level.

Evidence of Impact

Service User feedback

Caredig provided us with some recent qualitative feedback that had been collected from service users and which suggests their experience of the organisation is in line with a trauma and ACE-informed approach:

“No-one restricts what I can do, what I want, I can go on holidays, decide what food I want. No one stops me making decisions I want to make and I feel in control.”

“The best thing about living here is my room. I feel safe living here.”

“I feel safe and if not, staff help me.”

These sentiments were reiterated in the Ripple Effect Mapping (REM)¹ session, where staff members described a shift to more person-centred support, moving away from prescriptive service plans to person-led approaches which they felt was helping service users to feel heard and valued.

Staff feedback

We were provided some qualitative comments from staff about their experiences of working for Caredig, and we also collated data during the REM session in February 2025.

Feedback from staff suggests they feel supported by the organisation:

“I feel very safe in my role, there’s been lots going on here. Things have been busy. I feel really supported.”

“They’re there if I need them, but have the autonomy to make decisions. I feel part of the Organisation, the best bit is having the freedom to do what we need to do, the trust is there.”

“I get the right support. I can take positive risks and not be afraid to get it wrong. If there’s challenges I can have a rant and not be judged.”

These sentiments were reflected in the REM session, with the workplace culture being described as moving away from a fear-based, blame culture to one where staff are encouraged to try new approaches without fear of negative consequences.

¹ 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.

TrACE CASE STUDY: Coleg Gwent

Coleg Gwent is one of Wales's largest and top performing further and higher education colleges across five campuses offering a wide range of part-time and full-time academic and vocational courses. Coleg Gwent promotes the core values of respect for all, solutions driven, always learner first and act with integrity as well as a diversity charter and TrACE culture.

Changes made in line with the TrACE Toolkit

Policies and procedures



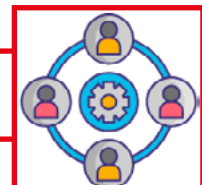
As a result of implementing the TrACE Toolkit, Coleg Gwent changed its Learner Disciplinary Policy (May 2021) to a 'Behaviour' policy (March 2024).

The emphasis of the earlier Disciplinary Policy was on the procedure of disciplining students, using a system of raising concerns in the first instance, followed by a 1st formal warning (yellow card) a 2nd formal warning (red card) and finally at the 3rd stage, a disciplinary hearing. This disciplinary system was set within the context of the college providing a safe and orderly learning environment for all learners with the understanding that they are more likely to behave well if they are in an environment where they feel respected and capable.

In contrast, the Behaviour Policy of March 2024 uses restorative approaches rather than punishment to address negative behaviour, ensuring that all learners are treated fairly, are shown respect and are supported to develop life skills for learning. The behaviour expectations are linked to the 3 college values of 'Be Respectful, Be Ready, Be Safe'. In this policy, the guidance for managing learner behaviour is all around the modelling of expected behaviour by staff; for example, being aware of one's own moods and triggers, taking time to greet and smile at learners, being visible, not shouting, and engaging in reflective dialogue with learners. Praise for positive behaviour is encouraged, whilst negative behaviour can be reminded of in private; respectfully and fairly.

In interviews with Coleg Gwent staff, most mentioned that the college has revised its Behaviour Policy to focus on support rather than punishment. They explained how the approach now emphasises understanding the reasons behind behaviour and offering help to prevent future issues. The ethos of being 'respectful, ready, safe' has been introduced to all learners and staff and was described as being aligned with a trauma and ACE-informed approach.

Workforce training and support



The Coleg Gwent staff intranet pages contain a wealth of information around TrACE, including a description of ACEs, education around psychological tools such as ‘the window of tolerance’ and Dan Siegel’s Hand Model¹, signposting to educational videos, posters and guides, reports and leaflets, and links to ACE Hub Wales and other useful internet sites. This provides a rich resource for staff, all in one place.

Additionally, it is through the staff intranet that training in trauma-informed practice can be requested. This can be delivered as bespoke, individual or training in groups. The training on offer covers awareness of ACEs and the impact on behaviour, enabling everyone to recognise their role in a ‘whole college’ trauma and ACE-informed approach; provides techniques and strategies for working with learners and staff who may have experienced trauma and finally a review of college practice to become more trauma-informed.

Coleg Gwent have invested in training a significant proportion of their workforce. The table below highlights that as of June 2024, over 800 members of staff had received TrACE training. In interviews with staff from Coleg Gwent, they noted that the TrACE training was shortened to fit staff schedules so that it did not impact teaching time. Participants also explained that the college are continuing to train all new staff and are keen to further embed online training. During the Ripple Effect Mapping (REM)² session in February 2025, staff described a structured induction process for all new staff who receive training on trauma and ACEs. Staff also have access to refresher training on request.

Training snapshot June 2024

	Phase 1	Phase 2
Campus 1	148	35
Campus 2	96	70
Campus 3	30	20
Campus 4	99	86
Campus 5	139	139
TOTALS	512	350

1 [Hand Model of the Brain - Dr. Dan Siegel](#)

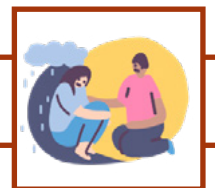
2 This was a session facilitated by the evaluation team with staff members who had been involved in implementing the TrACE Toolkit. The purpose of the session was to understand if and how changes had led to impacts.

Physical environment



Interviews with Coleg Gwent staff suggest some campuses have installed display boards to help students access support more easily. Where possible, and in new builds, campuses are designed to provide large support rooms, reflective spaces and a prayer room. They have carried out surveys to better understand what learners want but admit that they have challenges with how old the buildings are and finding the funding to change them. Several participants mentioned that the physical environment is a work in progress, with a willingness and desire to create more inviting spaces.

Service design and delivery



Interviews with Coleg Gwent staff suggest that the culture has changed to reflect the shift in learning perspectives with trauma in mind. This was said to affect everything they do for the learners and how the learners interact with the college. One mentioned that they're working on embedding support mechanisms across all of the campuses (for learners), such as having a support hub, reception and library, all in the same area, so learners don't have to walk long distances for what they need. In addition, it was mentioned during interviews and the REM session, that various on-site and external services, such as counsellors, sexual health resources, and partnerships with organisations like Mind, are available to students.

Evidence of Impact

Training feedback data

Feedback collected by Coleg Gwent suggests high satisfaction with the training provided. Following TrACE Phase 1 training, 45 evaluation forms were received, of which 69% of staff scored the usefulness of the session at 100%. A further 29% of staff scored the usefulness of the session at 80-90%. Overall 69% declared that they would definitely make changes to their professional practice as a consequence of the training.

Comments suggested the presentation of the session was engaging, with an interesting variety of material (videos, images, stats, card games); *"there were lots of videos and images etc to break up delivery of the course"* and participants were encouraged to take part. The group discussions came in for particular praise; *"discussing with others, listening to others ideas."* Additionally comments spoke highly of the quality of the delivery of the course; *"You were able to make it so interesting and not feel like a chore"* *"Well delivered by 3 members of staff"*.

"There were lots of videos and images etc. to break up delivery of the course."

Student feedback data

Coleg Gwent also provided us with data about the experience of students. Overwhelmingly, learners agreed that the college is a safe place to learn and study.

99% of students feel the college is a safe place to learn and study.

93% of students were aware of the Be Ready, Be Respectful, Be Safe communication campaign.

Staff feedback during the REM session

Staff who took part in the REM session described witnessing a cultural shift in the college, with staff in non-pastoral roles feeling more confident in handling student behaviour. They also commented that staff were more aware of the barriers that learners face, that more students were being referred to appropriate services and that the college had a more welcoming and inclusive environment.

TrACE CASE STUDY: Flintshire Youth Justice Service

Flintshire Youth Justice Service (YJS) is part of Flintshire County Council and works together with families and other agencies to make sure each young person gets access to the help they need. The primary role of the YJS is to prevent offending by children and young people. In addition to prevention, pre-court or court outcomes, children and young people also receive additional support and interventions linked to education, mental health support and the Youth Justice Centre.

Changes made in line with the TrACE Toolkit

Governance, leadership and organisation culture



Flintshire YJS have committed to becoming a trauma-informed service and have outlined a number of key organisational aims which are intended to impact the culture of the organisation:

- **Resilience & Strengths focused** to help staff develop the physical, mental, emotional and social strengths to support children and young people to adapt and grow ensuring they have a sense that they can achieve
- **Person Centred** such that staff listen and encourage / facilitate honest conversations responding to and delivery of co-produced plans with children, young people and families
- **Relationship Focused** by being kind, listening, being flexible, approachable, transparent and realistic with clear boundaries and support
- **Inclusivity** by ensuring that children and young people feel valued and supported to have equal access to services, support and opportunities, that they don't feel judged in accessing support and that their cultural and diversity needs are met
- **Universal Approach that does no harm** by utilising diversion and supporting access to universal services and avoiding and challenging the use of labels

In order to maintain momentum to becoming a trauma-informed service, a TrACE working group was established to support the service to progress actions against the self-assessment and implementation plan. The working group includes membership from:

- Wrexham University – Lecturer in Criminology & Trauma-informed Practice in Youth Justice
- ACE Hub Wales – Deputy Leader
- YJS Management Team
- YJS Practitioners (Trauma Champions)

ACE Hub Wales undertook a report on behalf of Flintshire Youth Justice Service (YJS) to baseline an understanding of trauma-informed practice to help the service to develop its staff and services for children. They identified that becoming a trauma-informed service is a long term strategy for Flintshire YJS.

Policies and procedures



Flintshire YJS have made a commitment to reviewing their policies and procedures to align with a trauma and ACE-informed approach. Their commitment was recognised during an inspection by HMIP (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation) in March 2024:

The YJS is developing trauma-informed practice through its partnership with Public Health Wales and by implementing the TrACE toolkit. It is also developing trauma-informed practice in its policies and procedures. This includes reviewing the use of language in reports (p.13).

Additionally Flintshire YJS continues to ensure that when policies and procedures are being reviewed, that trauma and ACEs are being considered and that engagement of young people, parents, and carers is undertaken and that sufficient time is provided in planning transitions.

During interviews with staff, it was noted that policies now have more flexibility to accommodate individual needs rather than rigid enforcement. Staff feel more confident in justifying decisions within a trauma-informed framework (e.g., not returning a child to court for non-compliance when there are underlying issues).

Workforce training and support



There have been a number of developments in this domain:

- YJS have introduced more reflective practice forums to help staff implement trauma-informed practice.
- Induction material has been updated and now references TrACE and Child First.
- A tailored youth justice training package has been developed with ACE Hub Wales and is being implemented.
- Additional training on vicarious trauma and trauma-informed language has been delivered through university partnerships.

Physical environment



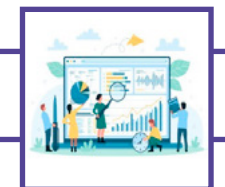
Making changes to physical environments has been challenging, particularly because they are working within the wider criminal justice system (which is often not designed to meet the needs of CYP). However, meetings have taken place to discuss plans for creating child friendly spaces in some venues, highlighting that any spaces need to be mindful of TrACE principles. Discussions are also underway with His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service to explore opportunities to influence trauma-informed physical spaces in Court.

Service design and delivery



Flintshire YJS organised a team day in 2023 to start to look at service principles based on their statement of commitment. They developed a framework that allows practitioners more autonomy to focus on building trust and meeting children's needs rather than strictly following programme-based interventions. Staff now have the flexibility to form meaningful relationships with children, which was previously discouraged.

Monitoring and evaluation



Flintshire YJS have developed a number of approaches to monitor and evaluate their progress in implementing the TrACE Toolkit. The YJS Senior Manager undertakes annual staff assessments with the YJS team to assess their thoughts and feelings on the service and serves as a 'health check' on operational and strategic activities. This in turn informs the annual Youth Justice Plan.

Flintshire YJS has also attempted to increase feedback from children and young people. At the end of the child or young person's involvement with the service, they ask them to fill in a questionnaire commenting on their experience. So called 'soft outcomes' (relationships, accommodation, behaviour) before and at the end of interventions are also measured.

The Staff Stress Risk Assessment has been a recurring review conducted since 2018 by the YJS management team. The purpose of the assessment is to review the general welfare of the team and to provide an opportunity to discuss the wider operational and strategic elements in the service.

The organisation is still developing its approach to measuring trauma-informed impact. Existing tools (feedback forms, baseline staff assessments, training completion data) are being used to track progress. A key challenge is capturing long-term qualitative impacts that may not be immediately visible or quantifiable.

Evidence of Impact

External recognition

Following an inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation in March 2024, inspectors commented on the approach to trauma-informed practice at Flintshire YJS:

The service is committed to becoming a trauma-informed service. In partnership with ACE Hub Wales (Public Health Wales) and Wrexham University, it has used the TrACE toolkit to develop an action plan and regularly monitors progress against this (p.11).

In November 2023 the Youth Justice Service Management Board commissioned a Peer Review from the Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership (YJSIP) to review the approaches to leadership and governance. Below are some of the comments linked to the TrACE work following their assessments:

“The PRT [Peer Review Team] found a consistent recognition and commitment to trauma-informed approaches. Partners commented on the YJS driving the agenda to embed trauma-informed language and practice, across the workforce and the partnership.”

“It was clear to the PRT that there was corporate ownership of ‘our’ children, regardless of the route by which children become known to services. There was clear evidence of a consistent awareness of trauma at all levels and a commitment to a trauma-informed workforce and practice.”

Staff perspectives

During the Ripple Effect Mapping (REM)¹ session with Flintshire YJS, it became clear how their use of the TrACE Toolkit had encouraged them to look outwards as well as inwards. They described working on a number of wider initiatives that are attempting to integrate trauma awareness into the systems that impact young people’s lives (including schools, police, magistrates, justice services etc). Much of this work is facilitated by close working relationships across sectors in North Wales.

While we did not have access to direct feedback from staff in Flintshire YJS, the service manager was able to provide a summary of their annual staff assessment review:


“Staff felt that they had a good degree of autonomy in the work that they do and that they have flexibility to deliver interventions in a manner in which they feel would be responsive to the child or young person. Staff feel that there is an increased understanding of working in a trauma-informed way but again raised that the ability to deliver such approaches is reliant on having enough resources and the team not being impacted by vacancies / long term absences” (Flintshire YJS Staff Assessment 2024)

Based on this assessment review, it was felt there had been a noticeable shift in how children are discussed, with a greater focus on understanding their broader experiences. This shift is now more evidence-based, giving staff greater confidence in articulating trauma-informed approaches. Staff are described as speaking with more confidence because they know that this forms part of a trauma-informed approach.

¹ 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.

Feedback from young people

Feedback from CYP suggests they feel listened to, communication is good and there is an emphasis placed on developing good relationships. Self-reported feedback gathered from 88 CYP at the end of intervention, suggests positive gains have been made in most areas of their lives.



*"I think you've been brilliant.
You've listened to me and I don't
think anyone else does."*

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 principles¹ 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)² session, staff explained that students had been involved in the policy review process, leading to changes in the Extenuating Circumstances and Academic Conduct policies.

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 Toolkit³, 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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