

# TEACHERS GET BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM THEIR FRIENDS

New research identifies the impact of strong social and professional relationships on trainee teachers' retention and performance, and highlights how training organisations can better support these

The Relationships Foundation, in partnership with Suffolk & Norfolk SCITT, the Open University and Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing, has presented the first findings from its five year longitudinal study of the social and relational factors that affect trainee teachers' resilience and retention. Working with more than 100 trainees, researchers found that:

- the more relationships a trainee had, the less likely they were to drop-out of the training programme;
- both personal and professional relationships enhance resilience but when one aspect is limited, the other can compensate;
- trainees with stronger and closer relationships with their personal tutors were not just more likely to complete the programme, but also to outperform their peers.

This data is important for teacher training organisations at a time of teacher shortages, where fewer are coming forward to train as teachers, and more are choosing to leave the profession. The hope is that training organisations can better understand how to support their trainees so that fewer leave during their training programme, and that schools can similarly come to understand the importance of relationships for career resilience, adapting their systems to help early stage teachers build and maintain their social networks.

Suffolk & Norfolk SCITT, one of the country's largest school-centred initial teacher training programmes, commissioned the Relationships Foundation to carry out the study, and to follow the 2018 cohort through to their fourth year of practice. It has already further developed its approach to recruitment and trainee support as a result of the findings, and is seeing positive results. Commenting, Anna Richards, Executive Leader, Suffolk and Norfolk SCITT, said: "We know at heart that relationships influence the ways in which people cope with stress, access support and advice, learn, collaborate, and find fulfilment in their work, but it's only by quantifying these things that we can properly manage them. We know now that certain relational factors make it more likely that some people will leave a course or the profession, and have begun to intervene earlier with the right support to empower trainees. As a result, we have already lost fewer trainees this year, and are confident that this is due to a more relational approach."

Much of the social network analysis was carried out on behalf of the Relationships Foundation by Dr Alison Fox, Senior Lecturer in Education at the Open University, whose pioneering work in this field helped focus the study. Commenting, Alison said: "The mapping of trainee teachers' social networks provides a window onto the wealth of resources on which they draw. If this mapping takes place as part of professional conversations with tutors and mentors, potential vulnerabilities are revealed, enabling the trainee, ITT provider and school to reflect and respond. One of the key findings has

been the importance of the ‘unsung relational heroes’ in an early career teacher’s network. Even without holding formal support roles, these vital links can provide the key emotional and professional support which keeps a trainee on track and a teacher in post. The SCITT tutors are now advising schools and trainees to look towards what has been termed mosaic mentoring, in which the skills, time and emotional generosity of those on placements are harnessed to support individual trainees to meet their needs.”

The trainees also answered Cambridge Assessment’s Cambridge Personal Styles Questionnaire (CPSQ), so that personality traits could be correlated with performance and retention. Commenting on this aspect of the research, Dr Rob Loe, CEO of the Relationships Foundation, said: “Thanks to Lyn Dale and her colleagues at Cambridge Assessment, we were not only able to show how training organisations and schools can support teachers with relational strategies, but also how certain traits predict performance, and might even help define the sort of relational support required at stressful times. For example, the CPSQ outcomes indicated that whilst trainees who scored well in terms of ‘caring & compassion’ and ‘ability to cope with demands’ were less likely to leave the training course, those whose responses indicated a relatively high degree of perfectionism were more likely to leave. Our partners at the Suffolk & Norfolk SCITT can now identify trainees with these traits and intervene, even before they commence their course, personalising both their programme and support package to help build their resilience.”

The Relationships Foundation and its partners at the Open University and Cambridge Assessment are now looking to work with other teacher training providers to scale up the research and build a dataset that supports system-wide improvements in practice.

Available at: [TEACHERS GET BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM THEIR FRIENDS - Relational Schools](#)