

# EMPOWERING EXCELLENCE



**DR CHINTHA DISSANAYAKE DESCRIBES THE IMPACT OF A STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN A WELSH SECONDARY SCHOOL**

The Covid-19 pandemic has been described by ex-schools tsar, Sir Kevan Collins, as ‘the most significant disruption to education since World War II’ (Fazackerley and McKie, 2023). Against this backdrop, I would like to share a case study featuring a secondary school located in one of the most socioeconomically disadvantaged regions of Wales. This school was designated by ESTYN as ‘in need of significant improvement’ in 2018, prompting its governors and leaders to embark upon a bold and transformative learning journey to recovery. The school-wide staff talent development programme that followed, in partnership with Oxford Psychometrics, not only equipped staff to navigate the subsequent pressures of the pandemic, but in developing a resilient school-wide culture, continues to benefit both students and staff alike.

The concept of *personal resilience* refers to the ability to bounce back from challenging situations and keep moving forward, even when things get tough (Cooper, Flint-Taylor and Pearn, 2013, p.15). A more recent concept, *team resilience*, is an idea that goes beyond the summing up of individual strengths within a team (Alliger et al., 2015). According to the insights shared Flint-Taylor and Cooper (2017), team resilience revolves around how teams collaborate when faced with pressures, stressors, and complex situations. Unlike personal resilience, where a manager has a supportive role, team resilience demands a more proactive role from the manager or leader. They play a crucial part in ensuring that the entire team navigates tough situations successfully.

In 2018, with financial support from a county council community fund and the backing of the school leadership and its board of governors, the Staff Talent Development Programme opened its doors to all staff at a Welsh secondary school, on a completely voluntary and confidential basis.

Using real-time surveys, school-wide feedback sessions and workshops to guide the school’s well-being journey, and individual and team-based initiatives to stimulate discussion, the learning and development activities of the Staff Talent Development Programme aimed to:

1. Create greater **Confidence** in their own and each other’s abilities;
2. Engage **Purposefulness** by linking personal and school strategic goals into individualised Career Development plans;
3. Encourage **Adaptability** by challenging negative thinking patterns to help individuals and teams develop more flexible approaches to working;
4. Foster **Social Support** to help individuals discuss issues more openly and frankly using a common language to reduce seclusion;

5. Monitor school-wide **wellness** using the **ASSET survey**;

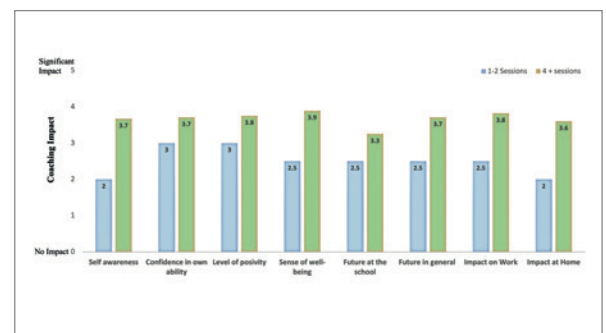
6. Provide individual **feed-back** using **Psychometrics**:

- **Saville Wave Focus Styles™** which measures motives, talents, preferred culture and competency potential, all in one dynamic online questionnaire.
- **At My Best 360™** – a Positive Psychology-based, online feedback tool that focuses on a person’s strengths.

## Results

1. Over three years, approximately 95% of all staff across the school participated on a voluntary basis in the Staff Talent Development Programme by engaging in surveys, workshops and one-to-one Career Development Coaching. Figure 1 describes the impact of coaching sessions across a range of self-reported areas.

Figure 1 - Impact of Career Development Coaching with number of sessions



2. The professional development planning empowered approximately 10% of staff to leave the school to pursue other paths in their careers. The following are examples of comments made by these staff:

- *I am more positive about my future and what it may hold and that there will be improved work-life balance.*
- *I am beginning to appreciate my skillset more and what options and opportunities these may open up for me.*

3. The ASSET survey monitored the *Workplace Risk Factors* operating within the school, enabling the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to explore strategies in real time to alleviate the pressures in each of the areas. At the start of the programme, there were four areas deemed ‘at **Risk**’ and the fifth ‘at **Caution**’ level. By the third year, strategies undertaken by the SLT in combination with staff-initiated actions alleviated pressure across all six areas.

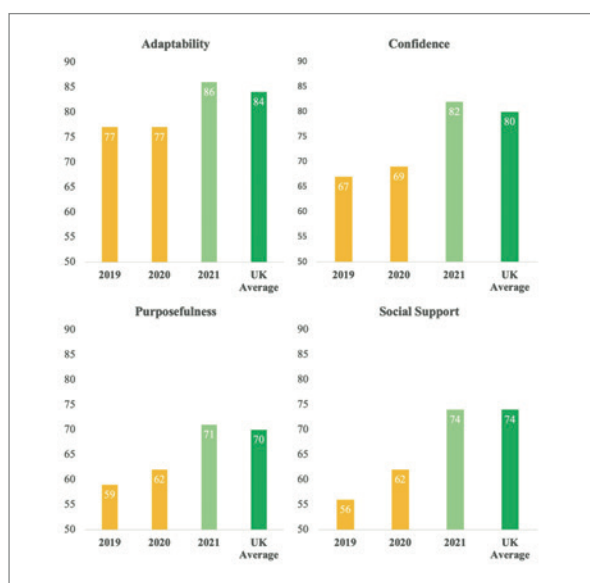
Figure 2. ASSET survey – changes reported across Workplace Risk Factors

Academic Year	Resources & Communications	Control	Workload	Job Security	Work Relationships	Job Conditions
2018/19	Risk	Risk	Risk	Risk	Caution	Risk
2019/20	Risk	Risk	Risk	Typical	Typical	Risk
2020/21	Typical	Typical	Typical	Typical	Typical	Typical

■ An area that is a significant risk, in comparison to General GB Working Population  
■ An area that is a potential risk or caution, in comparison to General GB Working Population  
■ An area that is positive or as typical as others in comparison to General GB Working Population

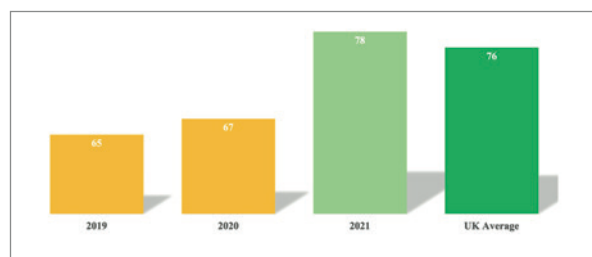
4. The ASSET survey identified a rise across all four 'Personal Factors' identified as impacting *Team Resilience* - confidence, support, purpose and adaptability - with staff feeling more able to cope with and bounce back from setbacks by drawing on these strengths. Staff were also able to draw upon these factors to face the challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 3. ASSET Survey - changes in the four personal factors that impact Team Resilience



5. ASSET Survey demonstrated an overall rise in *Team Resilience* during 2020-2021 as staff at the school, individually and collectively, rose to the challenges presented by the changing world around them.

Figure 4. ASSET Survey - changes in the four personal factors that impact Team Resilience



6. Key performance criteria provide insights into the actual impact of the programme on student and staff outcomes:

- Student attendance was maintained at 91% (the national average for school attendance in England for 2022/23 is 90.8%).
- Student performance at both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 revealed an overall rising trend in student achievement, with 2023 GCSE results being described as 'an astounding success'.
- Staff absence dropped from 566 days to 347 days, a reduction of almost 40%.
- In 2021, the school was removed from the ESTYN register of schools 'in need of significant improvement'.

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates the critical importance of establishing a positive, engaging learning culture for all within schools. By championing inclusivity and aligning personal and professional development with the school's strategic goals, staff are energised and motivated to work collaboratively toward shared objectives, in a way that responds effectively to the changing environment.

### Acknowledgements

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Saville Focus Styles™ - Available at: savilleassessment.com

**This study demonstrates the critical importance of establishing a learning culture for all within our modern schools today.**

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