

Teach Cornwall Report

Place-based challenges for
trainee teacher recruitment

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Jayne Kirkham MP

Foreword

I want to thank Tanya Ovenden-Hope, Victoria Brown, and Rosie Walsh for their valuable contribution to the local and national conversation on teacher recruitment and retention. This research helps explain why urban-centric teacher recruitment strategies don't fit in rural and coastal areas like Cornwall.

As the Member of Parliament for Truro and Falmouth, and a former teaching assistant, I know how opportunities and barriers — especially in education — are shaped by our specific geography. The challenges we face differ fundamentally from those in urban areas, and as this study shows clearly, they are deeply rooted in place.

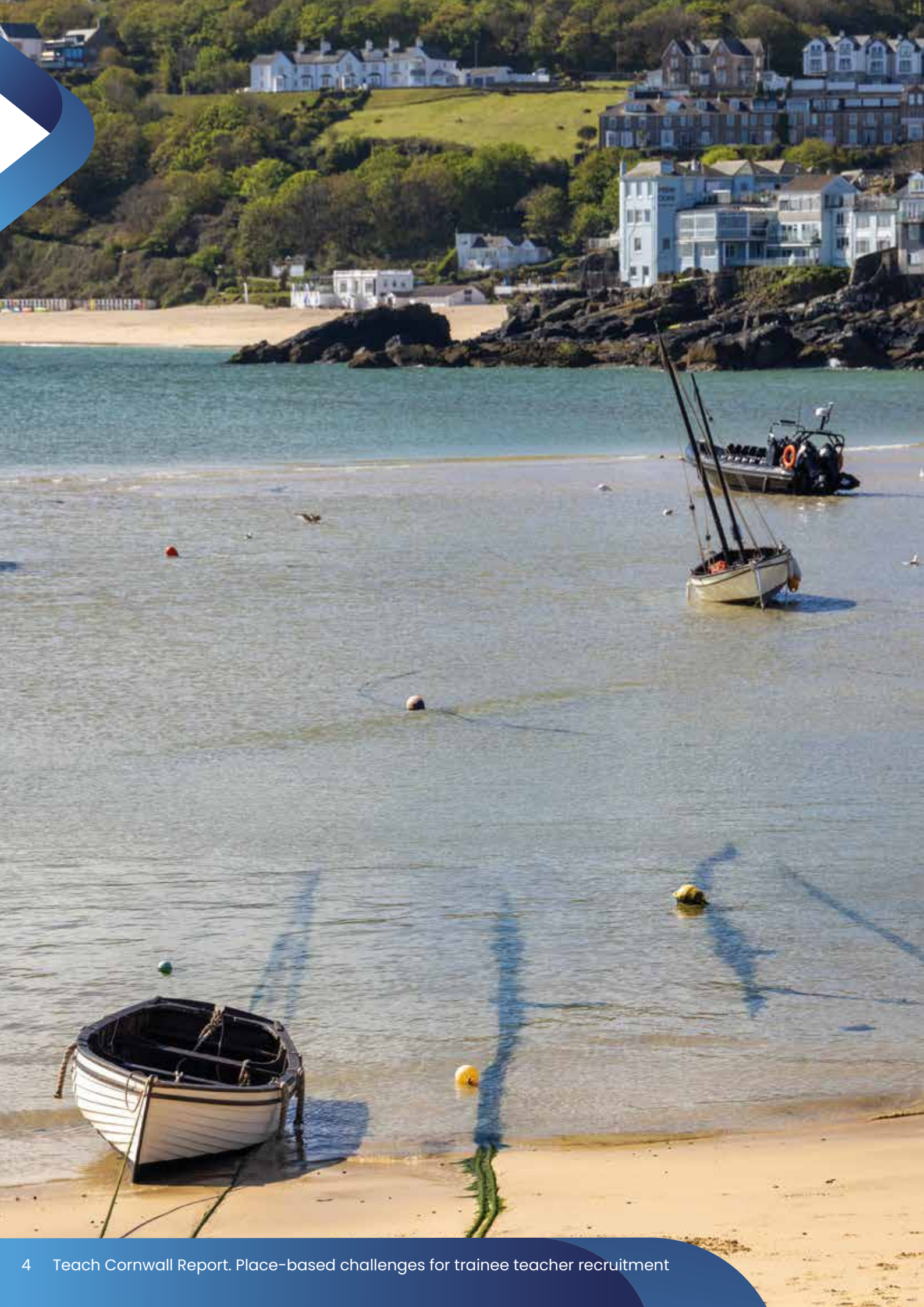
I found the concept of educational isolation, explored in this report, powerful. It is something many people in our duchy will recognise: a mix of geographic remoteness, high living costs, and limited diversity and connectivity. And in this context, it affects not just access to training, but also belonging and support once in the teaching profession.

Teaching is an essential profession, and amid a national shortage, we must create pathways that work. Here in Cornwall, trainees contend with long commutes, a housing crisis, and limited job opportunities — particularly in the primary sector. The voices in this report remind us that solutions must be shaped by those on the frontline.

There is hope. The report doesn't just expose problems, it also offers place-based solutions, from tailored support for underrepresented trainees to collaborative innovations. These insights matter for all rural and coastal communities across the UK who are facing similar barriers.

As a Labour and Co-operative MP from an area that is very far from London and other urban centres, I am committed to ensuring rural and coastal voices are placed at the heart of policy decisions and how we shape our future.

If we want to tackle teacher shortages everywhere, we must take rural realities seriously. That means systems that work with the grain of place.



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Executive Summary

This report presents a comprehensive analysis of the findings of the Teach Cornwall research project conducted by Plymouth Marjon University, which investigated the complex place-based challenges facing initial teacher training (ITT) recruitment in Cornwall. This report addresses a critical gap in understanding how place-based factors create systemic barriers to trainee teacher recruitment that are qualitatively different from urban contexts.

Cornwall exemplifies the compound challenges facing rural and coastal teacher training, serving 75,718 pupils across 295 schools and operating with a highly academised system where 80% of state-funded schools are part of academy trusts. The county's teacher training is served by twelve ITT providers competing for limited trainee numbers. Despite national teacher shortages, Cornwall experiences a paradoxical situation of localised oversaturation, particularly in primary education, where established teachers rarely leave due to limited alternative employment opportunities within commutable distances.

Critical Findings

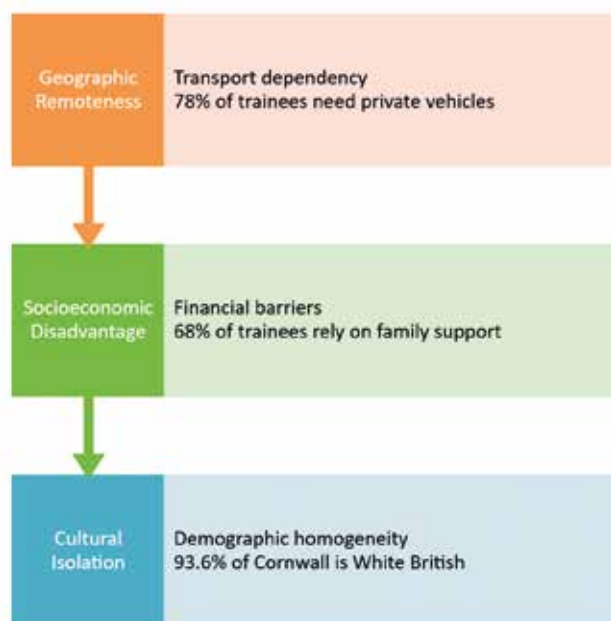
The research employed a critical review of literature and conducted interviews with trainee teachers and ITT providers. The findings reveal that Cornwall's trainee teacher recruitment challenges are fundamentally place-based, arising from the intersection of geographic remoteness, socioeconomic disadvantage, and cultural isolation that establish educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019).

1. Geographic Remoteness – Transport dependency affects 78% of trainees who require private vehicles for school placements, creating cascading inequities particularly for disabled trainees and those from low-income backgrounds. Poor transport infrastructure forces trainees into unsustainable commutes, with one reporting “almost two hours each way”, travel that was “clearly unsustainable” and detrimental to “health and wellbeing”.

2. Socioeconomic Disadvantage – Cornwall ranks 83rd of 326 areas for deprivation, with average salaries 12% below the national average. Housing displacement driven by second-home ownership creates acute accommodation challenges, forcing trainees into suboptimal arrangements including caravans or requiring family support. The research found 68% of trainees relied on family support to manage training costs, highlighting dependency on existing social capital and community resilience.

3. Cultural Isolation – Cornwall's demographic homogeneity (93.6% White British in 2021) creates professional isolation, particularly affecting ethnically diverse trainees. One participant noted: “if there is a reason for me to leave Cornwall, it will be because I want to work where I'm not the only different person”. Limited access to professional development opportunities and cultural experiences further compounds isolation challenges.

Teach Cornwall: Initial Teacher Training and Place-Based Challenges



These findings align with a wider study of Cornwall exploring rural deprivation conducted by members of this research team. The Pretty Poverty Report (Ovenden-Hope, Brown, & Achtaridou, 2025) identified six place-based challenges that are not recognised in national measures of deprivation, five of which were reported by the trainee teachers and ITT providers interviewed, these were transport dependency, housing displacement, employment precarity, community resilience and educational isolation.

The Teach Cornwall Report offers findings that challenge conventional understanding of trainee teacher recruitment:

Place-Based Recruitment Patterns: The vast majority of trainee teachers already live in Cornwall prior to applying, indicating that traditional national recruitment strategies modelled on urban patterns of recruitment may be ineffective for rural and coastal contexts.

Employment Precarity Paradox: Despite national teacher shortages, Cornwall trainees report limited job opportunities due to low teacher turnover, or 'lack of churn' in coastal and rural schools.

Community Resilience Masking Infrastructure Needs: Strong family and community support enables training to continue but masks the fundamental infrastructural changes needed to create equitable opportunities.

Alternative Pathways Success: 43% of trainees entered teaching via alternative pathways, including career changes and teaching assistant progression, reinforcing the demographic profile of trainee teachers in Cornwall is predominantly mature and local.

No centrally held data for the teacher workforce in Cornwall: There is a gap in data profiling teachers at a local level, which was identified when plans to examine secondary teacher workforce data from each of the MATs, Local Authority and colleges were abandoned due to inability to access these data. It is our recommendation that the Department for Education reviews requirements for the collection and sharing of local data (county level) on the teacher workforce to support local strategies for enhanced trainee and teacher recruitment.



Assets and Opportunities

Despite significant challenges, the research identified substantial assets unique to rural and coastal initial teacher training:

Environmental and Pedagogical Benefits: Trainees consistently highlighted Cornwall's natural environment as contributing to both personal wellbeing and unique pedagogical opportunities, with schools recognising that outdoor learning has "real benefit for children academically, but for mental health and well-being".

Accelerated Professional Development: Small rural and coastal schools create opportunities for immediate professional integration, with one trainee feeling "a little bit more like a teacher from day dot".

Community Connections: Rural and coastal schools enable deeper relationships with students and families, contributing to professional satisfaction and in part explaining high middle career teacher retention rates.

Community resilience is demonstrated by the comprehensive strategies Cornwall's ITT providers have developed to mitigate the place-based challenges they have experience in recruiting trainee teachers:

- 1. Collaboration:** The OneCornwall ITT Provider Network successfully addressed fragmentation through shared branding, joint recruitment events, and coordinated placement arrangements.
- 2. Innovative Delivery Models:** Hub-based approaches and hybrid learning reduced travel requirements by up to 40% for trainees.
- 3. Targeted Recruitment:** "Grow your own" strategies and alternative pathway development leveraging local connections and mature trainees.
- 4. Enhanced Support Systems:** Mentoring programmes, peer networks, and financial support addressing rural-specific challenges.
- 5. Marketing Improvements:** Lifestyle-focused promotion emphasising Cornwall's environmental and community benefits

The Teach Cornwall Report makes key recommendations to mitigate the place-based challenges for ITT recruitment in Cornwall and other similar areas. These recommendations are pragmatic, relying on ITT providers, schools, colleges, local authorities to do what they can while policy making catches up with place-based needs.



Recommendations

1. To address geographic remoteness establish creative collaborations and nurturing networks.

For example, develop local training hubs and hybrid delivery models; create virtual professional learning communities and technology-enabled mentorship programmes.

2. To address socioeconomic disadvantage establish individualised incentives: and right-fit recruitment.

For example, implement area-weighted bursaries reflecting the true costs of training in educationally isolated areas, including housing subsidies and emergency support funds; develop authentic recruitment materials and assessment processes that evaluate candidates' understanding of rural and coastal contexts,

4. System-Level Implications.

The research demonstrates that sustainable solutions require fundamental shifts toward place-sensitive policy and practice. Current approaches that treat all places equally fail to address the specific infrastructural challenges of rural and coastal areas.

The educational isolation framework and specific strategies developed through Teach Cornwall offer practical pathways for other rural and coastal areas facing similar challenges with both trainee and teacher recruitment. The research contributes to growing evidence that rural-coastal education requires different approaches than urban education, providing a foundation for more effective and sustainable approaches to trainee teacher recruitment that build on local assets while addressing systemic barriers.

The report's significance extends beyond Cornwall to rural areas across the UK and internationally, offering both theoretical frameworks and practical solutions for addressing the complex interplay of place-based factors that create unique challenges for teacher recruitment in educationally isolated contexts.



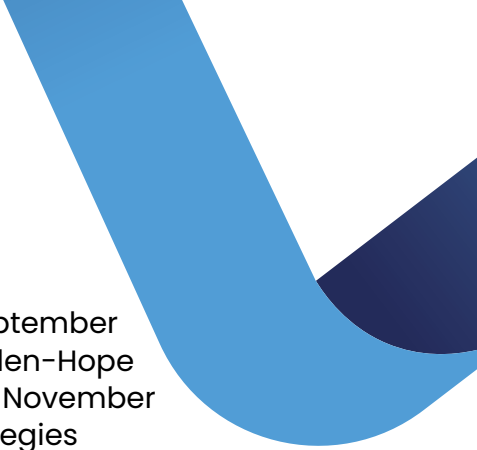
Introduction

The recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers represents one of the most sustained and significant challenges facing education systems globally (Jiang & Yip, 2024; Opoku, et al., 2025; Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2020), with rural and coastal areas experiencing disproportionately acute difficulties (Ovenden-Hope, Passy, & Iglehart, 2022; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; McPherson, Lampert, & Burnett, 2024). In England, this challenge is particularly pronounced, with approximately one-third of teachers leaving the profession within their first five years, rising to 52% within the first decade (Department for Education, 2024). For rural and coastal schools and colleges, such as many in Cornwall, these recruitment and retention challenges are compounded by additional place-based barriers that extend beyond those faced by urban schools and colleges (Ovenden-Hope, Passy, & Iglehart, 2022; Tran, 2023).

Cornwall, as England's most southwestern county, presents a unique case study for understanding rural and coastal trainee teacher recruitment and retention challenges. In 2024/25 academic year there were 295 schools (278 state funded and 6 independent schools) (Save My Exams, 2025; Cornwall Association of Primary Heads, 2025) and 2 college groups consisting of 3 and 10 colleges sites respectively (Cornwall Council, 2025). The schools in Cornwall are either regulated within a multi academy trust (MAT) or by the local authority.

Cornwall is highly academised with a mature MAT landscape. At the time of writing this report there were 18 MATs with approximately 222 schools in Cornwall (Cornwall Association of Primary Heads, 2025), leaving 56 local authority maintained schools in the county (The Hoot, 2024). This means that 80% of state-funded schools in Cornwall are part of an academy trust. Cornwall schools served 75,718 pupils across all schools in the 2024/25 academic year (Save My Exams, 2025). The colleges serve approximately 8,800 post-16 students and apprentices (Gov.UK, 2025), with colleges located from Penzance in the West of Cornwall to Stoke Climsland to the East. There are 12 ITT providers training teachers in Cornish schools, including School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT), university, MAT and college delivered programmes. Understanding the diversity of school, college and ITT provision of Cornwall's education landscape explains in part the challenge for recording and holding central data for the county on the teaching workforce.

Cornwall has a population of 570,305 spread across 1,376 square miles, the county exemplifies the complex interplay of geographic, economic, and cultural factors that combine to create educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019). The region's economy, heavily dependent on seasonal tourism, creates employment precarity (Ovenden-Hope, Brown, & Achtaridou, 2025) that affects trainee access, participation and sustainability to Initial Teacher Training (ITT). Housing displacement driven by second-home ownership and limited rental opportunities (Ovenden-Hope, Brown, & Achtaridou, 2025) force many trainee into challenging accommodation arrangements. Poor road networks and limited public transport options creates a private transport dependency (Ovenden-Hope, Brown, & Achtaridou, 2025) that limits school placement options and ITT provider choices.



The Teach Cornwall research was conducted between April 2024 and September 2025, developed from a presentation given by Professor Tanya Ovenden-Hope (Plymouth Marjon University) to the OneCornwall ITT Provider Network in November 2023. It was realised that existing national ITT trainee recruitment strategies were inadequately addressing the specific place-based challenges faced by rural and coastal Cornwall. Professor Ovenden-Hope designed the research with the conceptual lens of educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019) to understand how place-based factors could create systemic barriers to trainee teacher recruitment and experience that are qualitatively different from urban contexts.

Educational isolation refers to the compound effect of geographic remoteness, socioeconomic disadvantage, and cultural isolation that limits a schools or colleges access to resources and reduces their agency for improvement (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019). This concept moves beyond simple geographic considerations to recognise how multiple dimensions of place interact to create unique challenges for many rural and coastal schools and colleges. The concept provides a more nuanced understanding of place-based education challenges than previous models focused primarily on geographic distance or economic deprivation in seclusion.

The research addresses a critical gap in understanding how initial teacher training provision can be affected in places with educationally isolated schools and colleges, and solutions suggested for the effective organisation and delivery of ITT in rural and coastal contexts. While national policy has begun to recognise the need for place-based approaches to education improvement (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), 2022), implementation has often remained centralised and urban-focused (Ovenden-Hope, 2024). The One Cornwall ITT Provider Network initiative, established in 2023, represents an innovative collaborative approach bringing together the (then) 12 ITT providers from across Cornwall to coordinate recruitment efforts and share resources.

This report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities facing ITT recruitment in Cornwall, drawing on extensive primary and secondary research to offer evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice. The analysis is structured around the three dimensions of educational isolation, examining how geographic remoteness, socioeconomic disadvantage, and cultural isolation create specific barriers to trainee teacher recruitment in Cornwall, while also identifying assets and opportunities that can be leveraged for sustainable solutions.

The research questions addressed include: Who are the trainees that train to teach in Cornwall, and what attracts them to the region? What are the most effective strategies employed by Cornwall's ITT providers for recruiting trainees? How do the factors contributing to educational isolation affect trainee experiences and career decisions? What place-based solutions can address the compound challenges of rural teacher recruitment?

The significance of this research extends beyond Cornwall to other rural and coastal areas across the UK, and internationally, facing similar place-based challenges. The educational isolation concept provides a transferable lens for understanding place-based recruitment challenges, while the collaborative approaches developed through Teach Cornwall offer practical models for addressing these challenges through partnership working and shared resources.



National Teacher Recruitment Challenges

Teacher recruitment numbers are informed predominantly by the number of trainee teachers accepted onto teacher training programmes in England against the target number set by phase and subject by the government. Teacher training programmes range from apprenticeships to undergraduate programmes to postgraduate certificates of education (PGCEs), but all lead to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) conferred after a two year early career teacher entitlement.

England has reached unprecedented levels of poor teacher recruitment in recent years, only recently showing signs of returning to pre-pandemic levels in 2025 (Norden, 2025), but still with significant challenges in shortage subjects, such as Physics (Weale, 2025). The lowering of trainee target numbers for 2025 entrants, in line with falling school rolls, supported a more positive set of data for teacher recruitment in 2025, with less trainee teachers required to be recruited and train.

Poor general teacher recruitment has implications for trainee teacher recruitment, as the status of teaching is eroded when it fails to be seen as a graduate profession of choice (Ovenden-Hope T., 2022). It also needs to be understood that teacher recruitment is not evenly distributed across the country. Rural and coastal areas, like Cornwall, experience disproportionately greater challenges than urban areas in attracting trainee teachers to programmes (Ovenden-Hope, Passy, & Iglehart, 2022), with fewer providers in more remote places following the ITT Market Review (2021 – 2024) reducing access to ITT in rural contexts (Brooks, 2025).

The attrition rates for teachers leaving the profession internationally are concerning. Approximately one-third of teachers leave the profession within their first five years in England (Department for Education, 2024), with some international measures reporting rates as high as 40-50% (McPherson, Lampert, & Burnett, 2024). Recent research indicates that only 60% of current teachers see themselves remaining in the profession for the next three years (Allen, Hannay, & McInerney, 2025).

The geographical dimension of this teacher workforce crisis is particularly stark. Research indicates that rural and coastal areas, in England and internationally, consistently report greater challenges with attracting and retaining early career teachers, subject leaders and senior leaders than urban areas (Hollingworth & An, 2025; Huan, Bin Hassan, Wan Jaafar, & Aminuddin, 2023; Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2020). Coastal and rural school leaders identified greater difficulties with all types of staff recruitment and retention than urban schools or colleges, with rural-coastal schools and colleges experiencing additional challenges related to geographic isolation and limited access to professional development opportunities and cultural opportunities, including those required to fulfil national curriculum requirements (Ovenden-Hope, Passy, & Iglehart, 2022; See, Morris, Gorard, & El Soufi, 2020).



Cornwall's Context

Cornwall's unique demographic and economic profile significantly influences its trainee teacher and teacher recruitment landscape. The county's population density is significantly lower than the national average, with 56% living outside of towns (European Network for Rural Development, 2018), making Cornwall a sparsely populated rural and coastal county:

"The sparse population contributes to challenges in service delivery, transport access, education provision and employment opportunities."

(Ovenden-Hope, Brown & Achtaridou, 2025: 16)

Add to this Cornwall's peninsula location and it creates a 'geographic determinism' where relatively short distances can require extended time travelling due to an inadequate transport infrastructure, exacerbated at times of increased tourist road use. The county's economic profile presents both challenges and opportunities for trainee teacher recruitment. Cornwall was ranked 83rd of 326 for deprivation by the Index of Multiple Deprivation in 2019 (Cornwall Council, 2019). Cornwall's economy is heavily dependent on seasonal tourism, which accounts for 20% of employment, creating income volatility that affects trainee sustainability (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2025). The average salary in Cornwall (£29,302) is 12% below the national average, creating additional financial pressures for those supporting trainee teachers while they qualify to teach. However, this economic context also means that teaching is viewed as a relatively secure profession, which brings both benefits of teacher continuity for students, but challenges through 'lack of churn' and with it job availability in the county (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2015; Ovenden-Hope, Passy, & Iglehart, 2022).

Housing affordability represents a critical challenge for teacher recruitment in Cornwall. The proliferation of second homes and holiday lets has significantly impacted the availability and affordability of housing for local residents, including trainee teachers (Cornwall Community Foundation, 2025). This housing crisis is compounded by the high costs of relocation for trainees from outside Cornwall.

Educational Isolation

The concept of educational isolation provides a crucial framework for understanding Cornwall's trainee teacher recruitment challenges. Educational isolation occurs when schools or colleges have limited access to resources due to the combined effects of geographic remoteness, socioeconomic disadvantage, and cultural isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019). This framework recognises that place-based challenges are not simply about distance but involve complex interactions between place-based factors that compound to create unique barriers.



Geographic remoteness in Cornwall manifests through inadequate public transport links and the peninsula's isolated location. The county's longitudinal spine road network creates significant travel times between communities, with transport dependency a key feature of living in Cornwall's rural and coastal areas (Ovenden-Hope, Brown, & Achtaridou, 2025).

Socioeconomic disadvantage is evident in Cornwall's ranking as 83rd out of 317 local authorities for overall deprivation in the IMD 2019, with 17 neighbourhoods in the top 10% of most deprived areas in England (Cornwall Council, 2019). One in five children are reported to be living in poverty in Cornwall (Trehwela, 2025). This deprivation affects schools and colleges, and the communities they serve, creating complex challenges for both trainee and teacher recruitment. The combination of low wages, limited employment opportunities, and high living costs creates "pretty poverty" where picturesque locations mask significant economic hardship (Ovenden-Hope, Brown, & Achtaridou, 2025) that reduces the attractiveness and accessibility of training to teach in places like Cornwall.

Cultural isolation manifests through Cornwall's demographic homogeneity (93.6% White British in 2021) and limited access to cultural opportunities and professional development. This isolation creates particular challenges for ethnically diverse trainees. The lack of diversity also affects trainees' ability to learn how to teach students' from and in culturally diverse classrooms.

The ITT Provider Landscape

Cornwall's ITT provision reflects both the opportunities and challenges of teacher training in a county with many educationally isolated schools and colleges. The county currently has 12 ITT providers, including Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), universities, school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) programmes. This relatively high number of providers for a county of Cornwall's size creates both opportunities for diverse training pathways and challenges related to market fragmentation and competition for limited trainee numbers.

The provider landscape includes established institutions such as Plymouth Marjon University, which has trained teachers for over 180 years, and the University of Exeter; alongside Cornwall SCITT established in 2000 and various MAT-based programmes, and Kernow Initial Teacher Education. This diversity reflects the sector's response to national policy changes promoting school-led teacher training while also addressing specific local needs.



However, this fragmented landscape presents challenges for coordination and collaboration. With 76% of providers reporting unsustainable competition for limited trainee numbers, there is recognition of the need for more coordinated approaches to recruitment and training. The OneCornwall Teaching School Hub established an ITT Provider Network in 2023 in an attempt to address these challenges through collaborative working and shared branding.

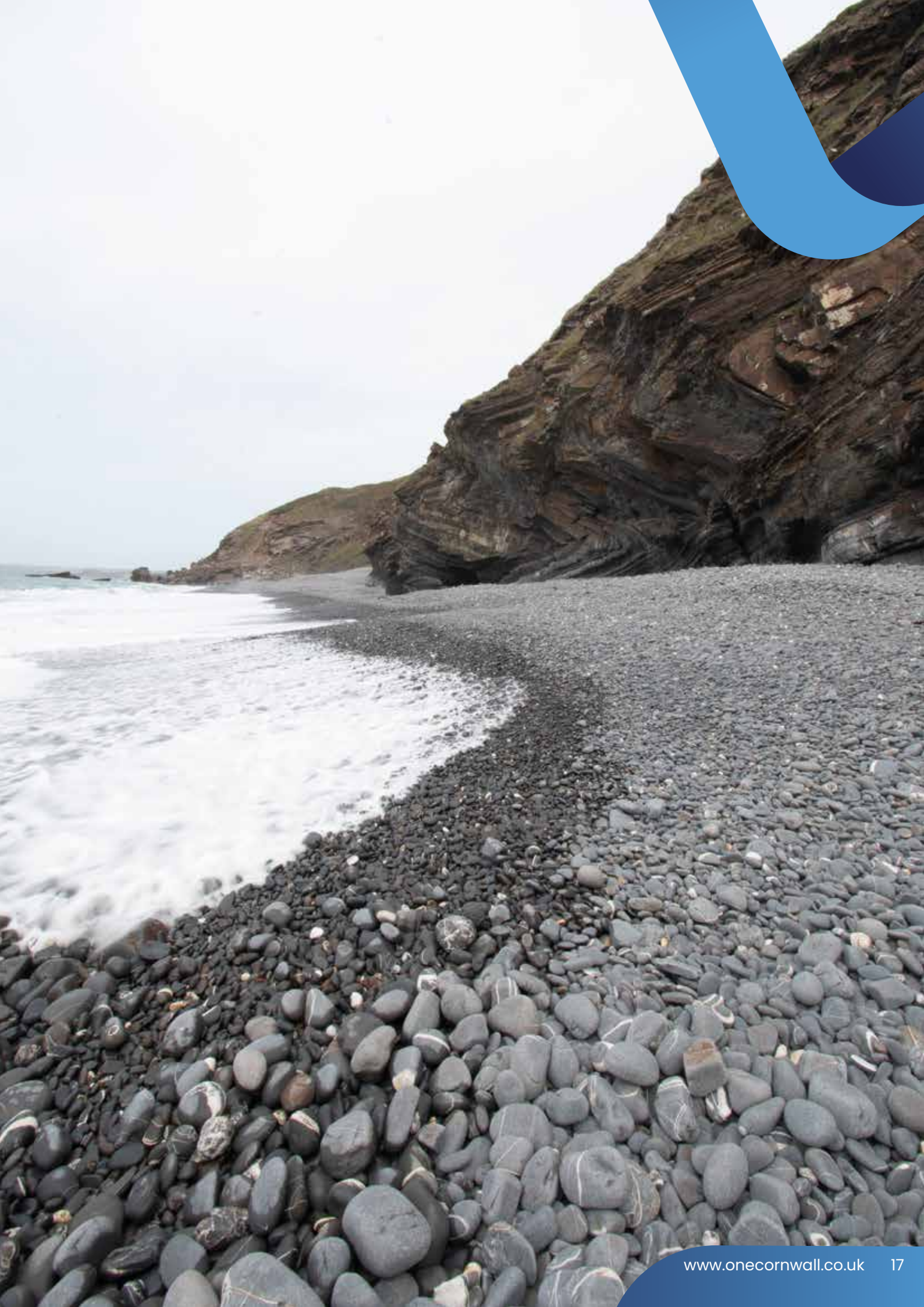
The provider landscape also reflects the broader challenges of teacher training in educationally isolated areas. Geographic isolation means that many providers struggle to offer diverse placement experiences, with one trainee noting that schools are “few and far between”. This limitation is compounded by the number of smaller rural schools that have more limited capacity to host multiple trainees simultaneously.

Policy Context and National Initiatives

The Department for Education’s recognised geographical ‘cold spots’ in teacher supply, which has led to various initiatives aimed at addressing teacher recruitment challenges and educational outcomes, such as the Education Investment Area initiative (Department for Education, 2023). However, these initiatives often remain centralised in design and implementation, with limited recognition of the specific challenges faced by rural and coastal areas.

Recent policy developments include the introduction of retention payments for teachers of shortage subjects, starting in 2025/26, and increases in training bursaries for shortage subjects (Department for Education, 2025). While these measures may have some impact on recruitment, research suggests that financial incentives alone are insufficient to address the complex challenges of rural teacher and trainee teacher recruitment (See, Gorard, Morris, & and El Soufi, 2020).

The Church of England’s Rural Teaching Partnership, supported by Teach First and the Chartered College of Teaching, represents an innovative approach to addressing rural trainee teacher recruitment challenges. This initiative intended to place trainee teachers in rural primary schools for two-year placements, with ten trainees in Cornwall (Plymouth Marjon University, 2021). Such initiatives recognise the need for targeted approaches that address the unique place-based contexts for ITT, however the outcome of this particular initiative was a very low number for trainee recruitment that made the programme unsustainable. The findings of this report offer suggestions for the poor recruitment of trainee teachers to educationally isolated areas.





Findings

The study reveals that Cornwall's trainee teacher recruitment challenges are fundamentally place-based, arising from the intersection of geographic remoteness, socioeconomic disadvantage, and cultural isolation – the three dimensions of educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019). Geographic remoteness manifests through transport dependency and professional isolation, the latter also reflecting cultural isolation for trainees. Socioeconomic deprivation is evident in housing displacement and employment precarity for trainees, who rely on family to ensure accommodation and financial support while they train, and attempt to find a job (particularly in Primary education) that is within commutable distance.

Community resilience was identified throughout the research, as in the family support identified above, and also in the solutions established by ITT providers to mitigate place-based challenges. The problem this presents, however, is that it masks the infrastructural changes needed in Cornwall to enable equitable transport and housing opportunities that would encourage trainee teachers from all over the country (and internationally) to train to teach in Cornwall. This research found that the large majority of trainee teachers in Cornwall already live in the county, with all those interviewed resident in the country prior to applying to an ITT provider.

The challenges for recruiting trainee teachers in Cornwall require wider place-sensitive policy changes that address the infrastructural challenges of the county. However, ITT providers have made significant adaptations to their recruitment practices to mitigate barriers for potential trainee teachers in the county, which will be explored in section 6.

1. Geographic Remoteness

The research revealed that geographic remoteness represents far more than simple distance, encompassing complex interactions between transport infrastructure, accessibility, and opportunity structures that fundamentally shape trainee experiences and career decisions in Cornwall.

1.1 Transport Infrastructure and Dependency

The most immediate manifestation of geographic remoteness is the inadequate transport infrastructure in Cornwall that creates significant barriers to trainee mobility. The research found that 78% of trainees require private vehicles for school placements (where extended teaching practice occurs), highlighting the fundamental inadequacy of public transport for sustaining rural and coastal teacher training. The lack of reliable public transport is a theme in the literature on rural education internationally (Jiang & Yip, 2024). The dependency on private transport creates cascading inequities, particularly affecting disabled trainees and those from low-income backgrounds who may lack access to reliable transportation.

The impact of transport challenges extends beyond mere inconvenience to fundamentally shape training school provider choices (manageable commute to schools or colleges in the providers networks), experiences (additional stress and anxiety caused by poor travel arrangements, or long time of travel) and career trajectories (decision on the job accepted depended on where the school or college was located). One trainee described a placement commute that “took almost two hours each way”, characterising this as “clearly unsustainable” and detrimental to “health and well-being”. Another trainee



reflected that the experience had helped them understand “how much [travelling] would be too much, and actually would destroy my love for teaching”, suggesting that transport challenges may contribute to early attrition from the profession.

For trainees with disabilities, transport challenges create additional layers of exclusion. One wheelchair user explained all the travel considerations required for her to get to a school for her training, considerations she believed were additionally taxing due to living and training to teach in Cornwall:

“There aren’t a lot of buses that come to where we live and I’ve had issues before where if the road is too steep, if there’s not a dropped curb, that kind of thing, I can’t actually get on buses with my chair, which is really frustrating.”

This experience illustrates how transport infrastructure inadequacies compound existing accessibility barriers, creating what amounts to structural discrimination against disabled trainees in rural and coastal areas with inadequate transport infrastructure.

1.2 Placement Choice and Professional Experience

Geographic remoteness also affects the diversity of professional experiences available to trainees. The limited number of schools or colleges within reasonable commuting distance restricts placement options, with one trainee noting that suitable schools are “few and far between”. This geographical constraint means that rural and coastal trainee teachers in Cornwall have access to fewer diverse placement experiences than their urban peers, potentially limiting their professional development and career preparation.

Small rural and coastal schools, while offering unique advantages in terms of community connection and pastoral care, also present limitations in terms of professional diversity and opportunity. One trainee observed that “when you have small schools like that, there are very few job opportunities”, highlighting how geographic remoteness creates not only training challenges but also subsequent employment constraints.

2. Socioeconomic Disadvantage

The research revealed that socioeconomic disadvantage in Cornwall operates at multiple levels, affecting both individual trainees and the broader system infrastructure that supports teacher training. This disadvantage manifests through financial precarity, housing unaffordability, and limited economic opportunities that create complex barriers to sustainable trainee teacher recruitment.

2.1 Training Cost Challenges and Community Resilience

Trainees in Cornwall face systemic financial inequities that extend beyond the standard costs of teacher training. Income in Cornwall in 2022 and 2024 was in the lowest range for the UK (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2024), creating additional financial strain for trainees who must often balance training costs with family financial support during training and reduced earning potential. This financial pressure is compounded by the additional costs associated with



rural living, including higher transport costs and limited access to affordable services (Ovenden-Hope, Brown, & Achtaridou, 2025).

Trainees living in Cornwall prior to training, having moved to the county from other countries, face particular financial challenges with bursary exclusions creating significant barriers to participation. One trainee noted being “ineligible for mathematics bursaries due to immigration status” resulting in “heightened debt” despite training in a shortage subject. This exclusion is particularly problematic given the need for diverse recruitment in areas with limited ethnic and cultural diversity.

The research found that 68% of trainees relied on family support to manage training costs, highlighting the extent to which rural and coastal teacher training depends on existing social capital and family resources. This dependency creates additional barriers for first-generation participants and those without family support networks, potentially limiting the diversity of the rural teaching workforce.

2.2 Housing Affordability and Displacement

Housing represents one of the most significant barriers to trainee teacher recruitment in Cornwall, with the research revealing how the tourism economy and second-home ownership create acute affordability challenges. Trainees reported that in Cornwall “the majority of the properties are converted into holiday rentals”, while others noted being “very lucky” to secure affordable housing, with suitable properties appearing rarely “within a two year period”.

The housing crisis forces trainees into suboptimal accommodation arrangements, with some living in caravans or requiring long commutes to access affordable housing. These accommodation challenges create additional stress and financial burden, potentially affecting both training completion and subsequent retention in the region.

Housing displacement also affects the broader sustainability of teacher recruitment in Cornwall. Without access to affordable, long-term housing, even successfully trained teachers may be unable to remain in the county’s rural and coastal areas, creating a fundamental contradiction between training investment and retention outcomes.



2.3 Employment Precarity

Cornwall's economy, heavily dependent on seasonal tourism, creates additional challenges for trainee and wider teacher recruitment. The seasonal nature of much local employment means that teaching represents one of the few stable career options, creating both opportunities and constraints for recruitment.

While teaching is perceived as a "secure job" in Cornwall, with trainees noting that "people tend to stay in the jobs longer", this stability can also create barriers for early career teachers. High retention of established teachers reduces turnover, creating a 'lack of churn' that reduces employment opportunities within the county (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2015). This paradox means that areas with the greatest need for teachers may simultaneously have the fewest opportunities for new teachers.

A concerning trend also emerged toward short-term contracts in teaching, with one trainee noting that available jobs were increasingly "fixed-term contracts" creating uncertainty about the sustainability of a career in teaching:

"The jobs being advertised do not offer the secure entry into the profession I was hoping for."

This shift toward employment precarity undermines the traditional stability that has made teaching attractive in areas with few large employers, such as in rural Cornwall.

3. Cultural Isolation

Cultural isolation emerged as perhaps the most complex dimension of educational isolation for exploring the experiences of trainee teachers and ITT providers in Cornwall, encompassing challenges related to demographic homogeneity, professional development access, and community integration.

3.1 Demographic Homogeneity and Professional Isolation

Cornwall's demographic profile (93.6% White British in 2021) creates unique challenges for ethnically diverse trainee teachers seeking to build professional identities and sense of belonging when training to teach in Cornwall. This homogeneity affects both individual experiences and broader system capacity to support trainees from diverse backgrounds.



One trainee commented on how demographic homogeneity can create professional isolation that affects teacher retention, even when all other conditions are favourable:

“It’s a bit of a challenge (being the only black trainee or teacher in the school)... if there is a reason for me to leave Cornwall, it will be because I want to work where I’m not the only different person.”

Sparsely populated, predominantly white British places, typically in rural and coastal areas are therefore more likely to experience fewer applications from ethnically diverse group trainee teachers and teachers, reinforcing existing low ethnic and cultural diversity.

The lack of diversity in Cornwall does affect educational opportunities and student experiences. The national curriculum requires schools to provide experiences of cultural diversity for students, and as such does not recognise constraints caused to the delivery of this by place. One trainee observed:

“As much as you can teach diversity within the curriculum, not being able to fully experience it does disadvantage the children.”

This recognition suggests that cultural isolation has implications beyond individual experiences to affect the quality of education available to students in rural areas (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019).

3.2 Professional Development and Professional Isolation

Cultural isolation manifests through limited access to professional development opportunities and career progression pathways (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019). The trainee teachers reported facing “professional isolation” due to distance from professional networks and development opportunities. This isolation can affect both training quality and long-term career sustainability.

The fragmented nature of Cornwall’s ITT provider landscape, with 12 providers competing for limited trainee numbers, creates additional challenges for professional development. While this diverse offer provides multiple pathway choices into teaching, it also creates coordination challenges and potential inefficiencies in professional development and training opportunities.

However, innovative approaches to addressing professional isolation were also identified, with ITT providers creating ‘Virtual Professional Learning Communities’ (V-PLCs) that were reported by a provider to be “as effective as, and potentially easier to access than face-to-face PLCs in improving teacher practice and collaboration”. This finding suggests that technology-mediated approaches can help address some aspects of cultural (as well as geographic) isolation.

3.3 Community Integration and Social Capital

Complex relationships were revealed between community integration and professional sustainability. While rural and coastal communities can provide strong social support networks (Macdonald, et al., 2025), they can also present challenges for trainees who do not easily integrate into established community structures (Leach & Bradbury, 2024).

Trainees reported both positive and challenging aspects of community integration. One noted being “welcomed with open arms” in a small school, making training “really nice” and creating an immediate sense of belonging. However, others highlighted the challenges of visibility in small school communities, with one noting: “In small schools, you can’t be anonymous”.

Successful community integration is crucial for long-term retention of teachers in rural and coastal areas (Macdonald, et al., 2025). One trainee expressed a sense of mission and community connection, which appears to be a key factor in sustaining trainee teachers on placement in Cornwall and for long-term career retention:

“I am really passionate about raising aspirations and raising children’s horizons, which is important given Cornwall’s challenges with rural isolation and the detached sense of belonging with the rest of the country.”

4. Assets and Opportunities: Leveraging Cornwall’s Rural and Coastal Advantages

Despite the significant challenges identified from Cornwall’s ITT operating within educational isolation, substantial assets and opportunities were revealed that distinguish teacher training in Cornwall in positive ways. These findings are crucial for developing strengths-based approaches to rural and coastal trainee teacher and teacher recruitment in Cornwall, and other places like Cornwall, which build on existing advantages rather than simply addressing deficits.

4.1 Environmental and Pedagogical Assets

Trainees consistently identified Cornwall’s natural environment as a significant asset for both personal satisfaction and professional practice. One trainee noted that the quality of the environment contributes to their well-being and professional motivation:

“Not only do I get to teach amazing children, but I’m also surrounded by absolutely lovely, beautiful landscapes that make me feel so much better.”

The natural environment also creates unique pedagogical opportunities that distinguish rural and coastal teaching from urban contexts. Trainees reported that schools they trained in understood the value to teaching of children being in green and blue spaces:

“Schools recognise that being outside not only has a real benefit for children academically, but for mental health and well-being. It is definitely more prevalent in Cornwall.”



This integration of learning into the environment represents a distinctive advantage for teacher training in Cornwall and similar places.

4.2 Community Connection and Professional Identity

Small rural and coastal schools create opportunities for immediate professional integration and identity development that may be less available in larger urban school contexts (Church of England, 2018; Ovenden-Hope, 2024). One trainee reported feeling “a little bit more like a teacher from day dot because there are so few adults in the school”. This accelerated professional identity development appears to be a significant advantage of training to teach in small school.

Rural and coastal schools and colleges used for ITT teaching placements also appears to create stronger community connections for both teachers and students. Trainees reported “knowing every child’s name” and developing deeper relationships with students and families than might be possible in larger urban schools or colleges. These relationships appear to contribute to professional satisfaction, and may explain in part the ‘lack of churn’ in teacher populations in Cornish schools and colleges identified above.

4.3 Alternative Pathways

43% of trainees entered teaching via alternative pathways, including teaching assistant roles and as career changes. The high proportion of career changers suggests that Cornwall, as a rural-coastal area with few large employers, may present teaching as a particularly attractive career option for more mature residents in low, part-time or seasonal employment. Mature trainees bring diverse life experiences and career changes typically have a strong commitment to the profession, both assets in an area with place-based challenges for trainee recruitment.

The prevalence of alternative pathways also suggests opportunities for “grow your own” strategies that build on existing community connections and local knowledge. One trainee progressed from being a “sports apprentice to teacher via a foundation degree and degree” illustrating how flexible pathways can enable local talent development.

5. Systemic Challenges and ITT Providers

Both challenges and opportunities exist in Cornwall’s ITT provider landscape.

5.1 Provider Fragmentation and Collaboration

The presence of 12 ITT providers in Cornwall creates diversity and choice, but 76% of ITT providers expressed concern that there was unsustainable competition for limited trainee numbers, particularly given that the vast majority of trainees already live in Cornwall. This fragmentation of training creates inefficiencies and may limit the effectiveness of individual providers to invest in the resources for high-quality training. However, the OneCornwall ITT Provider Network initiative, which brings all the ITT Providers that deliver initial teacher training in Cornwall to share information and cooperate for trainee recruitment purposes, represents an innovative approach to addressing these challenges through collaborative working. The initiative has created shared branding and coordinated recruitment efforts, with providers working together to solve low ITT recruitment. This collaborative approach offers a model for addressing ITT Provider fragmentation for rural and coastal areas while maintaining provider diversity.



5.2 Employment Precarity Paradox

A significant paradox was identified in Cornwall's teacher employment market, where national teacher shortages coexist with localised oversaturation. Despite national shortages, Cornwall trainees reported limited job opportunities, particularly in the primary sector. This finding has significant implications for ITT planning and policy. Traditional approaches to teacher recruitment that focus on national shortages may not adequately address the specific dynamics of rural places, such as Cornwall. It suggests that policymakers should consider place-based approaches that account for local workforce contexts rather than assuming that national (typically urban) patterns of employment in schools or colleges apply uniformly.

This requirement for place-sensitivity on assumptions of the school and college workforce is compounded by the lack of data held on teachers as a workforce in Cornwall. It was disappointing not to be able to collect the data to support a teacher workforce profile for Cornwall, as without a complete picture of who the teachers in Cornwall are, how can the teaching workforce be understood? And if the teacher workforce is not understood, how can we plan for the training of teachers that meets the needs of Cornwall? Given this finding, it appears urgent and crucial that policymakers consider how the current fragmented education system can share data to present a workforce profile at a local level that can inform initial teacher training and development.

6. ITT Provider Solutions to Improve Trainee Teacher Recruitment

ITT providers in Cornwall have implemented a comprehensive range of solutions to address their trainee teacher recruitment challenges. These initiatives are organised into five key categories to support other ITT training providers in areas similar to Cornwall considering strategies to address place-based ITT recruitment challenges.

1. Collaboration

The most significant innovation to impact on ITT recruitment was the OneCornwall Teaching School Hub ITT Providers Network, established in 2023 as a collaborative approach to address the fragmentation in Cornwall's ITT provider landscape. This initiative brought together all 12 ITT providers delivering training in Cornwall to coordinate recruitment efforts and share resources, rather than competing for the limited trainee numbers.

Key collaborative elements included:

- Shared branding and identity across all providers under a new 'Teach Cornwall' banner.
- Joint recruitment events and information sessions, including events at Truro and Penwith College.
- Coordinated school and college placement arrangements to maximise resource efficiency.
- A shared collaborative 'Teach Cornwall' webpage hosted by OneCornwall (OneCornwall, 2023) providing links to all ITT provision, recruitment events, school experience and routes into teaching in Cornwall.

This collaborative approach directly addressed the research finding that 76% of providers reported unsustainable competition for a limited number of trainees that were typically drawn from the county.

2. Innovative Delivery Models

To address any geographic remoteness challenges, providers developed creative delivery models:

The University of Exeter's Hub Model - implemented teaching hubs trainees to address rural access challenges by delivering training in multiple locations across the South West, including Cornwall, reducing travel requirements for trainees.

Plymouth Marjon University's Local Hubs - working with local schools and through the Plymouth Marjon University Cornwall hub in Truro, the university developed local trainee teaching locations that was found to reduce travel by 40% for trainees. This distributed training provision helped minimise travel barriers that are caused by Cornwall's peninsula geography.

Hybrid and Flexible Delivery - approaches were developed by all ITT provided that embraced online and hybrid-learning models, building additional capacity for flexible and synchronous teaching and training. This addresses issues of accessibility caused by transport dependency in geographically remote areas. 78% of trainees reported requiring a private vehicle to undertake their school placements, which have to take place in person. However, where teaching for the programmes was possible to do online, this was facilitated to remove travel barriers.



3. Recruitment Strategies

Providers developed targeted recruitment approaches that built on Cornwall's assets, including:

Alternative Pathways into ITT Development – alternative pathways were developed in recognition that many trainees were mature and career changes, therefore routes were found to support more trainees with these profiles

- Teaching assistant to teacher progression routes, including apprenticeships
- Foundation degree pathways
- Career changer pathways leveraging mature trainees' life experiences

'Grow Your Own' Strategies – these approaches targeted individuals with existing connections to the school, college and/or community, recognising that local knowledge and community connections were valuable assets for motivating further training to become a teacher for that school, college or community.

Alumni Networks – these were developed to maintain connections between Cornwall-trained teachers and current trainees, creating ongoing support and providing rich examples for potential teachers to hear what teaching in Cornwall is like.

4. Support Systems

Recognising the challenges of educational isolation for ITT in Cornwall, providers enhanced their support mechanisms for trainee teachers and those in schools and colleges supporting them:

Enhanced mentoring systems were developed by some ITT providers to account for the context of trainees in Cornwall. This acknowledged that traditional mentoring models might not adequately address the specific challenges of training to teach in rural and coastal educationally isolated areas.

Peer networks connected trainees across different provider institutions and training routes, addressing the professional isolation that can affect trainees in schools and college placements in geographical remote and culturally isolated areas.

Financial support initiatives included some ITT providers providing travel bursaries or travel costs to support the transport dependency established through school locations that were geographically remote.



5. Marketing and Promotion Improvements

Providers recognised the need for better communication about teaching opportunities in rural and coastal Cornwall:

Lifestyle-Focused Marketing was employed that emphasised Cornwall's natural environment and community benefits, recognising that trainees had identified the lack of promotion of "the lifestyles enjoyed by many Cornish teachers" as a key gap.

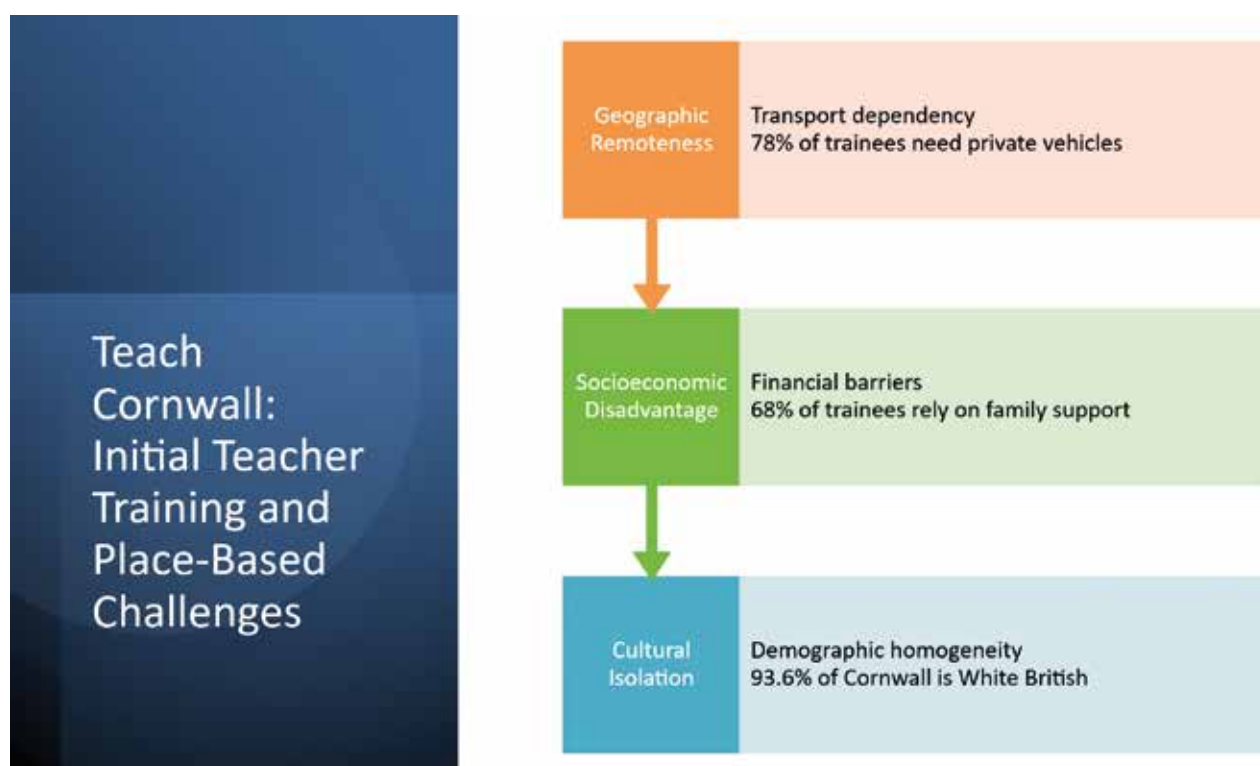
Real-Life Examples and Testimonials from current trainees were used to provide authentic representations of Cornish teaching experiences, addressing trainees' feedback that recruitment materials should show "a little bit more fun".

Digital and Social Media Approaches were developed to reach potential trainees through modern communication channels, recognising that traditional recruitment methods might not be reaching the desired audience.



Conclusion

This comprehensive analysis of the Teach Cornwall findings reveals the complex, interconnected nature of place-based challenges facing initial teacher trainee recruitment in rural and coastal contexts. The research demonstrates that educational isolation, encompassing geographic remoteness, socioeconomic disadvantage, and cultural isolation, provides a crucial conceptual framework for understanding why traditional, urban-centric approaches to teacher recruitment fail to address the specific needs of rural and coastal areas like Cornwall.



A significant finding of this research is the paradoxical nature of trainee teacher recruitment challenges in Cornwall. While national policy focuses on teacher shortages, Cornwall experiences localised lack of churn, particularly in the primary sector, where trainees report limited job opportunities. This paradox reflects the failure of national recruitment strategies to account for place-based variations in teaching workforces. The characteristics of Cornwall's infrastructure and economy, similar to other coastal and rural locations in the UK, result in employment precarity and housing displacement that affect teacher turnover. In Cornwall established teachers are less likely to leave a school or college for a role elsewhere due to the lack of other schools in commutable distance. Teacher turnover in coastal and rural areas is different to teacher turnover in urban area where density of schools in localised areas supports great teacher workforce movement (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2015).



The findings demonstrate that each dimension of educational isolation compounds the others, creating systemic barriers that are qualitatively different from urban contexts. Geographic remoteness is not simply about distance but involves inadequate transport infrastructure that creates transport dependency with additional accessibility barriers, particularly for disabled trainees and those from low-income backgrounds. When combined with socioeconomic disadvantage, evidenced by Cornwall's income gap and housing displacement, these geographic barriers become insurmountable for many potential trainees.

Cultural isolation emerges as perhaps the most complex dimension, encompassing not only demographic homogeneity but also professional isolation and limited access to career development opportunities. It also limits the diversity of educational experiences available to trainees and their students. This cultural dimension affects both individual trainee experiences and broader system capacity to support inclusive education.

The educational isolation conceptual framework was particularly valuable in moving beyond deficit-based understanding of education in Cornwall to recognise the assets and opportunities that rural and coastal contexts provide for the training of teachers. Trainee teachers highlighted the natural environment's contribution to pedagogy and wellbeing; the community connections fostered by small schools, and the alternative pathways that enable career changers to enter teaching, as benefits to training to teach in Cornwall. These findings suggest that sustainable solutions must build on place-based assets rather than simply addressing perceived deficits.



Implications for Policy and Practice

The Teach Cornwall Report contributes to understanding of place-based policy development and as such has significant implications for teacher recruitment policy at national, regional, and local levels. National policy must move beyond 'one-size-fits-all' approaches that treat all places as equal, with equal need and equal challenges. As demonstrated above, Cornwall has specific place-based challenges that require equitable, place-sensitive policy making to ensure that resourcing according to need happens in coastal and rural areas (Ovenden-Hope, Brown, & Achtaridou, 2025). This includes developing rural-weighted funding formulas, deprivation measures, creating place-based incentive schemes, and addressing regulatory barriers that exclude international trainees from bursary support.

Regional and local responses to enhance ITT recruitment must focus on collaborative approaches that address the fragmentation evident in Cornwall's ITT provider landscape. Competition between providers for limited trainee numbers creates inefficiencies and threatens system sustainability. The One Cornwall initiative provides a model for collaborative working that maintains provider diversity while coordinating recruitment efforts. The importance of 'grow your own' trainees strategies that build on local connections and alternative pathways into teaching is clear. There is an acceptance among ITT providers that recruiting trainees from "out of county" will not happen while transport dependency, housing displacement and employment precarity remain as key infrastructural challenges in Cornwall. However, the current government measurement of deprivation, the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019, lacks place-sensitivity and as such is unlikely to allocate any additional significant funding to rural and coastal places to support equitable living conditions to urban places (Ovenden-Hope, Brown, & Achtaridou, 2025).

The failure of national recruitment strategies to address Cornwall's specific challenges demonstrates the need for policymakers to recognise and respond to:

- infrastructural place-based challenges and the effect this has on both trainee and teacher recruitment for a more place-sensitive approach to policymaking and strategies related to ITT
- place-based variations in the teaching workforce, which requires the establishment of county level longitudinal data to profile and understand place-based variations in the workforce

The OneCornwall collaborative approach offers a promising model for addressing some of these challenges through partnership working and shared resources, but without place-sensitive policy making, equitable support for ITT in coastal and rural areas will not happen.

The insights from the Teach Cornwall Report extend beyond trainee teacher recruitment to raise broader questions about rural and coastal ITT provision in England, the UK and internationally (accepting that in most developed countries wealth flows to the coast). The ITT system reflects and reproduces the broader patterns of place-based inequality evident in policy making.





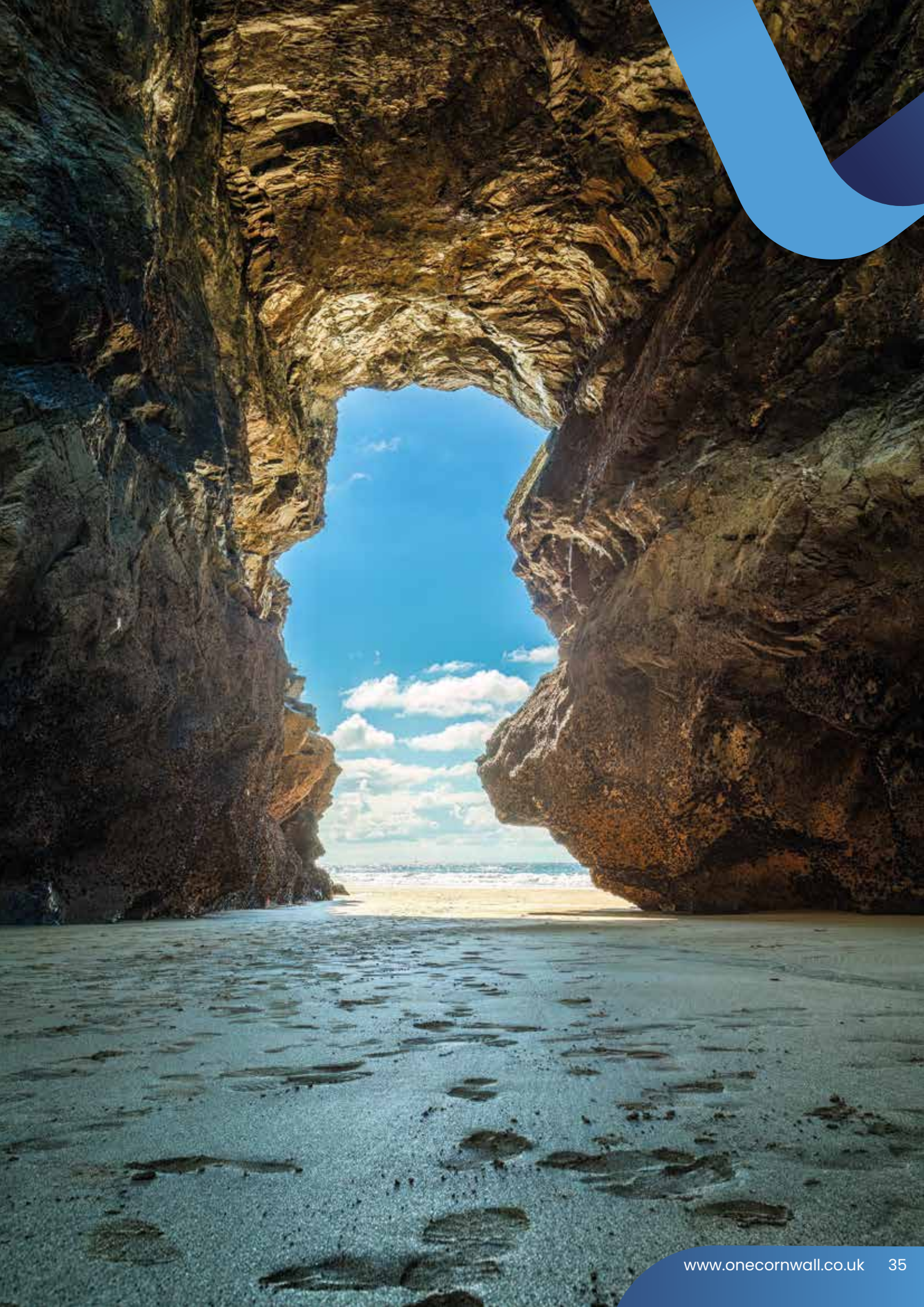
Final Reflections

The Teach Cornwall research and project demonstrate that sustainable solutions to ITT recruitment require fundamental shifts towards place-sensitive policy and practice. There needs to be a move beyond short-term fixes and financial incentives to address the systemic challenges of educational isolation through a sustained commitment to place-based equity from policymakers, providers, and communities.

It is clear that until this time there is transformative potential of collaborative approaches that bring together diverse stakeholders to address shared challenges. While this community resilience masks the real need, it does enable teacher training to continue in the county. The OneCornwall initiative provides a model for how fragmented systems can work together to create more effective and sustainable approaches to ITT recruitment in educationally isolated areas.

Ultimately, this report contributes to a growing body of evidence that rural and coastal education requires different approaches than urban education (see for example, Arinaitwe & Corbett, 2022; Bagley, Beach, Fargas-Malet, & Vigo-Arrazola, 2024; Bartlett, et al., 2025; Downes & Roberts, 2018; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Hollingworth & An, 2025; Ingersoll & Tran, 2023; Leach & Bradbury, 2024; Medeiros & Kane, 2024; Malone, 2024; Seelig & McCabe, 2021; Ovenden-Hope, 2024). The educational isolation framework (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019) provides a systematic way of understanding these differences, while the specific strategies developed through Teach Cornwall offer practical pathways for addressing the complex place-based challenges of trainee teacher recruitment.

The implications extend beyond Cornwall to other rural and coastal areas across the UK and internationally. By demonstrating how place-based factors create unique challenges and opportunities, this report provides a foundation for developing more effective and sustainable approaches to trainee teacher recruitment that build on local assets while addressing systemic barriers. It is worth remembering that education in rural and coastal places is not the problem, it is the context and as such needs to be understood and treated equitably.



Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive analysis of place-based challenges and opportunities in Cornwall's ITT recruitment landscape, this report presents six key recommendations organised around the three dimensions of educational isolation. These recommendations are designed to address systemic challenges while building on identified assets and opportunities, providing a framework for sustainable improvement that can be adapted to other rural and coastal areas facing similar educational isolation challenges. The section ends with system level recommendations to address wider place-based inequity that impacts ITT.

Addressing Geographic Remoteness

Recommendation 1: Creative Collaborations

The research demonstrates that geographic remoteness requires innovative approaches to ITT delivery that move beyond traditional models of centralised provision. The success of the two universities hub models in reducing travel requirements evidence for the effectiveness of distributed training approaches.

Implementation strategies should include:

- the development of local training hubs that bring provision closer to trainees, reducing travel requirements and associated costs. The establishment of shared facilities between ITT providers could maximise resource efficiency while maintaining program quality.
- Partnership arrangements with local transport providers to develop subsidised travel schemes for trainees accessing school and college placements.
- Government and provider investment in digital infrastructure to support hybrid delivery models that combine face-to-face and online components effectively.

Policy implications require recognition that ITT provision in educationally isolated areas requires different funding models than urban provision. The current funding arrangements do not adequately account for the additional costs of distributed delivery, creating place-based sustainability challenges. Government policy should include rural weighting factors in ITT funding that reflect the true costs of effective provision in educationally isolated areas like Cornwall.

Recommendation 2: Nurturing Networks

The report reveals that professional isolation represents a significant barrier to both recruitment and retention of trainees in educationally isolated areas. However, innovative approaches such as Virtual Professional Learning Communities (V-PLCs) demonstrate that technology-mediated networking can be as effective as face-to-face arrangements (and definitely better than not being able to access a PLC at all due to travel constraints).

Network development strategies should focus on:

- Creating cross-provider professional networks that enable trainees to access expertise and support beyond their immediate training context.
- Developing mentorship programmes that pair trainees in educationally isolated schools and colleges with experienced teachers from similar places who can provide context-specific guidance and support.



- Establishing alumni networks that maintain connections between Cornwall-trained teachers and current trainees, creating ongoing support systems.

Technology-enabled solutions should leverage digital platforms to create:

- Virtual placement exchanges that enable trainees to observe and learn from practice in multiple settings without physical travel. This could be particularly beneficial for establishing greater cultural diversity in trainees experiences.
- Online professional learning communities that provide ongoing support and development opportunities.
- Digital mentorship programs that connect trainees in educationally isolated schools and colleges with experienced teachers nationally and internationally in similar settings.

Addressing Socioeconomic Disadvantage

Recommendation 3: Individualised Incentives

Financial barriers operate at multiple levels, from direct training costs to housing and transport expenses. Current national incentive schemes do not adequately address the specific challenges of training to teach in educationally isolated areas, particularly given the additional costs associated with geographic remoteness and housing unaffordability. The recommendations below may also act as an incentive to potential trainees residing outside of these areas.

Financial support strategies should include:

- Educationally isolated area weighted bursaries that reflect the true costs of training to teach in these areas, including additional transport and accommodation expenses.
- Housing subsidies or guaranteed accommodation schemes that address the acute housing challenges identified.
- Emergency financial support funds that can address unexpected costs and crises that disproportionately affect trainees in educationally isolated areas, such as a broken-down car that they are dependent on for travel to their placement.

Long-term sustainability requires the development of rent-to-buy schemes specifically for teachers that address housing displacement challenges. Partnership arrangements with local employers to provide guaranteed employment pathways for successful trainees may also make training to teach in place like Cornwall more attractive.

Recommendation 4: Right-fit Recruitment

Successful trainee teacher recruitment in rural and coastal areas requires matching candidates to contexts rather than simply maximising numbers. The high proportion of career changers (43%) and alternative pathway entrants suggests that educationally isolated areas may be particularly effective at attracting mature trainees with strong commitment to place.

Recruitment strategies should focus on:

- Developing recruitment materials that authentically represent educationally isolated area teaching contexts, including both challenges and opportunities.
- Creating recruitment pathways that specifically target individuals with existing connections to the communities.
- To support retention and trainee well being, implementing assessment processes that evaluate candidates' understanding and expectations of training to teach in educationally isolated schools and colleges should be applied, rather than generic criteria.

"Grow your own" approaches should include developing teacher academies in rural- and coastal secondary schools and in colleges (in partnership would be even better) that create pathways for local students to enter teaching. Creating apprenticeship pathways that enable local teaching assistants and support staff to qualify as teachers is working well and could be used to inform a return-to-teaching programme that attracts former Cornwall residents back to the region.

Addressing Cultural Isolation

Recommendation 5: Maximised Mentoring

Mentoring and support systems are crucial for addressing cultural isolation and supporting successful integration of trainees into educationally isolated teaching contexts. However, traditional mentoring models may not adequately address the specific challenges of rural and coastal contexts, including professional isolation and limited diversity.

Enhanced mentoring approaches should include:

- Multi-layered mentoring systems that provide both professional and personal support during training and early career phases.
- Community mentoring programmes that help trainees integrate into rural and coastal communities and to understand local contexts.
- Peer mentoring networks that connect trainees across different provider institutions and training routes.

Mentoring capacity building requires training programmes for mentors that address the specific challenges of cultural isolation in educationally isolated schools and colleges. Recognition and reward systems that acknowledge the additional demands of mentoring in these contexts could incentivise participation. A retired teacher volunteer programme that expands mentoring capacity could be use educators experienced in working in coastal and rural schools and colleges.



Recommendation 6: Sustained Support

Cultural isolation affects both ITT experiences and long-term career sustainability. Addressing this dimension requires sustained support systems that extend beyond initial training into early career phases and beyond.

Support system development should include:

- Comprehensive induction programmes that address both professional and personal aspects of teaching in educationally isolated schools and colleges.
- Ongoing professional development opportunities that address the specific challenges of rural and coastal education contexts.
- Career progression pathways that enable teachers to advance professionally without leaving the rural or coastal area in which they are teaching.

Community integration support should focus on welcome programmes that help trainees develop a sense of belonging in the community in which they are teaching. Social networks and events that connect teachers with broader community activities and opportunities can support belonging and well being.

System Level Recommendations

Collaborative Governance

The success of the OneCornwall initiative demonstrates the potential for collaborative approaches to address ITT challenges in educationally isolated areas. This model could be extended and formalised through:

- The establishment of county level ITT partnerships that coordinate recruitment, training, and support activities.
- Shared resource arrangements that enable efficient use of resources.
- Quality assurance and improvement processes that maintain standards while recognising place-based contexts sensitively.

Policy Integration

Place-based ITT challenges require integrated policy responses that address education, housing, transport, and economic development simultaneously. This in turn requires:

- Cross-departmental policy coordination that recognises the interconnected nature of place-based challenges.
- Place-based funding arrangements that reflect the true costs of provision in educationally isolated areas.
- Localised development strategies that include teacher recruitment as a key component (regions are too big to make sense of place-based variability).

Research and Evaluation

The challenges encountered in this research highlight the need for improved data collection and monitoring systems that can inform evidence-based policy and practice development. This requires:

- Investment in place-based education research capacity that can provide ongoing evidence for policy development.
- Improved data collection systems that capture the specific challenges and opportunities of educationally isolated contexts.
- Longitudinal tracking of the teaching workforces in educationally isolated areas.
- Longitudinal evaluations of initial teacher training outcomes in educationally isolated areas.

Implications for Other Rural Areas

The recommendations developed from the Cornwall context are transferable to other educationally isolated areas facing similar challenges. The educational isolation framework provides a systematic approach to understanding place-based challenges, while the specific strategies can be adapted to local contexts and conditions.

The success of these recommendations will ultimately depend on recognition that ITT in coastal and rural locations requires different approaches than ITT in urban contexts; and that place-based solutions offer the most promising pathway to sustainable improvement.



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Appendix A

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The Teach Cornwall research project employed a mixed-methods approach designed to provide comprehensive understanding of the complex challenges facing ITT recruitment in Cornwall. The research took place between November 2023 and September 2025, with data collection occurring in multiple phases to capture the qualitative experiences of key stakeholders.

The research design was grounded in critical realist epistemology, recognising that while objective social structures exist, they are mediated through subjective experiences and interpretations. This approach was particularly appropriate for investigating place-based challenges, as it acknowledges both the material reality of geographic and economic constraints and the ways these are experienced and interpreted by individuals within specific contexts.

The theoretical framework of educational isolation (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019) provided the analytical lens for understanding how place-based factors interact to create compound challenges for rural teacher recruitment. This framework guided both data collection and analysis, ensuring that the research captured the multidimensional nature of rural and coastal area challenges rather than focusing solely on individual factors such as geographic distance or socioeconomic deprivation.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed include:

- Who are the trainees that train to teach in Cornwall, and what attracts them to the region?
- What are the most effective strategies employed by Cornwall's ITT providers for recruiting trainees?
- How do the factors contributing to educational isolation affect trainee experiences and career decisions?
- What place-based solutions can address the compound challenges of trainee teacher recruitment in educationally isolated areas?

Teach Cornwall Project Phases and Timeline

The research was structured in five distinct phases, reflecting the collaborative nature of the project and the need for both secondary and primary data collection⁴:

Phase 1 (November 2023 – December 2023): One Cornwall-led project initiation, with Professor Ovenden-Hope proposing the research approach and project title 'Teach Cornwall' and the ITT Network agreeing to collaborative working arrangements. This phase established the foundation for partnership working and secured funding for the research through One Cornwall.

Phase 2 (December 2023 – April 2024): Development of Teach Cornwall branding and dissemination strategies across ITT providers and stakeholders. This phase involved creating shared identity and communication materials to support collaborative recruitment efforts.

Phase 3 (April 2024 – December 2024): Plymouth Marjon University led secondary research, including ethics approval, comprehensive literature review and secondary data collection from ITT providers, schools, colleges, and local authorities. This phase encountered significant challenges with data collection, requiring multiple requests and revised approaches.

Phase 4 (January 2025 – May 2025): Primary research involving interviews with ITT providers, and current trainee teachers. Due to low response rate and lack of secondary data to profile the teaching workforce in Cornwall, interviews with school/college workforce leads were not conducted. This phase provided rich qualitative data on experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders.

Phase 5 (June 2025 – September 2025): Analysis and report writing. Dissemination of findings to support evidence-based policy and practice development planned for November 2025.

Data Collection Methods

Secondary Data Collection

The research team sought quantitative data on trainee demographics, recruitment patterns, and employment outcomes from ITT providers, schools, and local authorities. Data requests were sent to all 12 ITT providers, 21 Multi-Academy Trusts, and Cornwall Council, with simplified data collection templates developed to improve response rates.

Secondary data collection encountered significant challenges, with poor response rates from schools and colleges (5 out of 21 MATs responded, 0 colleges replied) and system changes affecting local authority data availability. These challenges themselves became significant findings, highlighting the fragmented nature of data collection systems in England for local reporting on the teaching workforce and of the capacity constraints faced by schools, colleges and ITT providers.

Primary Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were planned with three key stakeholder groups:

1. **ITT Providers:** Interviews with representatives from each of the 12 ITT providers in Cornwall, exploring recruitment strategies, challenges, and collaborative opportunities.
2. **Trainee Teachers:** Interviews with trainee teachers from each provider and representing diverse backgrounds and training routes, examining their motivations, experiences, and career intentions.
3. **School and College Leaders:** Originally planned interviews with school and college workforce leads were ultimately abandoned due to poor response rates, lack of secondary data to profile the Cornish teacher workforce and capacity constraints.

The interview approach was designed to capture both individual experiences and systemic perspectives, with questions exploring the three dimensions of educational isolation and their impact on recruitment and retention. All interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams, which enabled participation from across Cornwall's geographic spread while minimising travel requirements for participants.

Sampling

Trainee Teacher Sampling

A purposive sampling approach was employed to recruit trainee teachers for interview participation. The sampling process involved a multi-stage recruitment strategy:

1. **Initial Contact:** The lead researcher sent email requests to all 12 ITT providers in Cornwall, requesting their participation in facilitating trainee recruitment for the research project.
2. **Provider Mediation:** ITT providers were asked to share the research participation request via email with their current trainee cohorts, including information about the research aims, interview process, and ethical considerations.
3. **Direct Response:** Interested trainee teachers responded directly to the research team via a Doodle poll interview booking system, which allowed participants to select convenient interview times.
4. **Informed Consent:** All participants provided informed consent prior to interview participation, with ethical approval secured through Plymouth Marjon University's ethics committee.

This sampling approach enabled access to trainees across all ITT providers while respecting institutional gatekeeping arrangements and ensuring voluntary participation. The method also allowed for geographic and demographic diversity within the trainee sample, capturing experiences from different training routes and backgrounds.

ITT Provider Sampling

All 12 ITT providers in Cornwall were invited to participate in interviews, with the research team seeking to achieve comprehensive coverage of the provider landscape. This census approach ensured that the full range of provider types (universities, Multi-Academy Trusts, SCITTs) and training routes were represented in the research.

Participants interviewed in this research were 9 ITT Providers (75% of the population and representing MAT, university, SCITT and FE provision), and 9 trainee teachers representing MAT, university, SCITT and FE ITT programmes.

Analytical Framework

Qualitative Data Analysis

The primary analytical tool employed was Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (Braune & Clarke, 2021), which provided a systematic yet flexible approach to identifying, analysing, and reporting themes within the qualitative data. This approach was particularly suited to the research aims as it emphasises the active role of the researcher in theme development while maintaining methodological rigour.

The reflexive thematic analysis process involved six key phases:

1. **Familiarisation:** Initial reading and re-reading of interview transcripts to develop familiarity with the data scope and depth.
2. **Systematic Coding:** Line-by-line coding of transcripts to identify features relevant to the research questions, with particular attention to experiences related to the three dimensions of educational isolation.
3. **Theme Development:** Clustering of codes into potential themes, with consideration of how codes relate to each other and to the overarching research questions.

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4. **Theme Review:** Checking themes against coded extracts and the entire dataset to ensure they accurately represent the data patterns.
 5. **Theme Definition:** Developing clear definitions and names for each theme, with consideration of how themes relate to each other and to the educational isolation framework.
 6. **Report Writing:** Weaving together the analytical narrative with data extracts to demonstrate the prevalence and significance of each theme.

The reflexive approach emphasised the researchers' active role in theme construction, acknowledging that themes are not simply "discovered" within data but are actively created through the analytical process. This perspective was particularly important given the place-based nature of the research, where local context and researcher positionality significantly influence interpretation.

Conceptual Lens

The educational isolation concept provided the overarching lens for organising themes, with each dimension (geographic remoteness, socioeconomic disadvantage, cultural isolation) serving as a major thematic category. However, the reflexive thematic analysis allowed for the identification of cross-cutting themes and unexpected patterns that extended beyond the initial lens framework. The analysis process was iterative, with emerging themes explored against existing literature and refined through ongoing reflection on the data. This approach ensured that the analysis remained grounded in participant experiences while also engaging with broader theoretical and policy contexts.

The research also employed an assets-based approach within the analytical framework, recognising that while educationally isolated areas face significant challenges, they also possess unique assets and opportunities that can be leveraged for sustainable solutions. This perspective was crucial for developing constructive recommendations rather than simply cataloguing problems.

Limitations and Challenges

The research encountered several significant limitations that both constrained the analysis and provided important insights into the challenges of conducting research in rural contexts.

Data Collection Challenges

The poor response rates from schools and colleges (particularly the 0% response from colleges to secondary data collection) highlighted the capacity constraints and competing priorities faced by the educational institutions in Cornwall. These challenges reflect broader issues of resource constraints and administrative burden that affect schools in educationally isolated areas disproportionately.

Fragmented Data Systems

The inability of Cornwall Council to provide comprehensive longitudinal data on teacher profiles due to system changes illustrates the broader challenges of data collection and monitoring of the teaching workforce by local area. This was compounded by the different systems being used by MATs to monitor their workforce profiles and in some cases the fear of sharing these data with other educational organisations. This fragmentation makes it difficult to develop evidence-based policies and track progress over time.



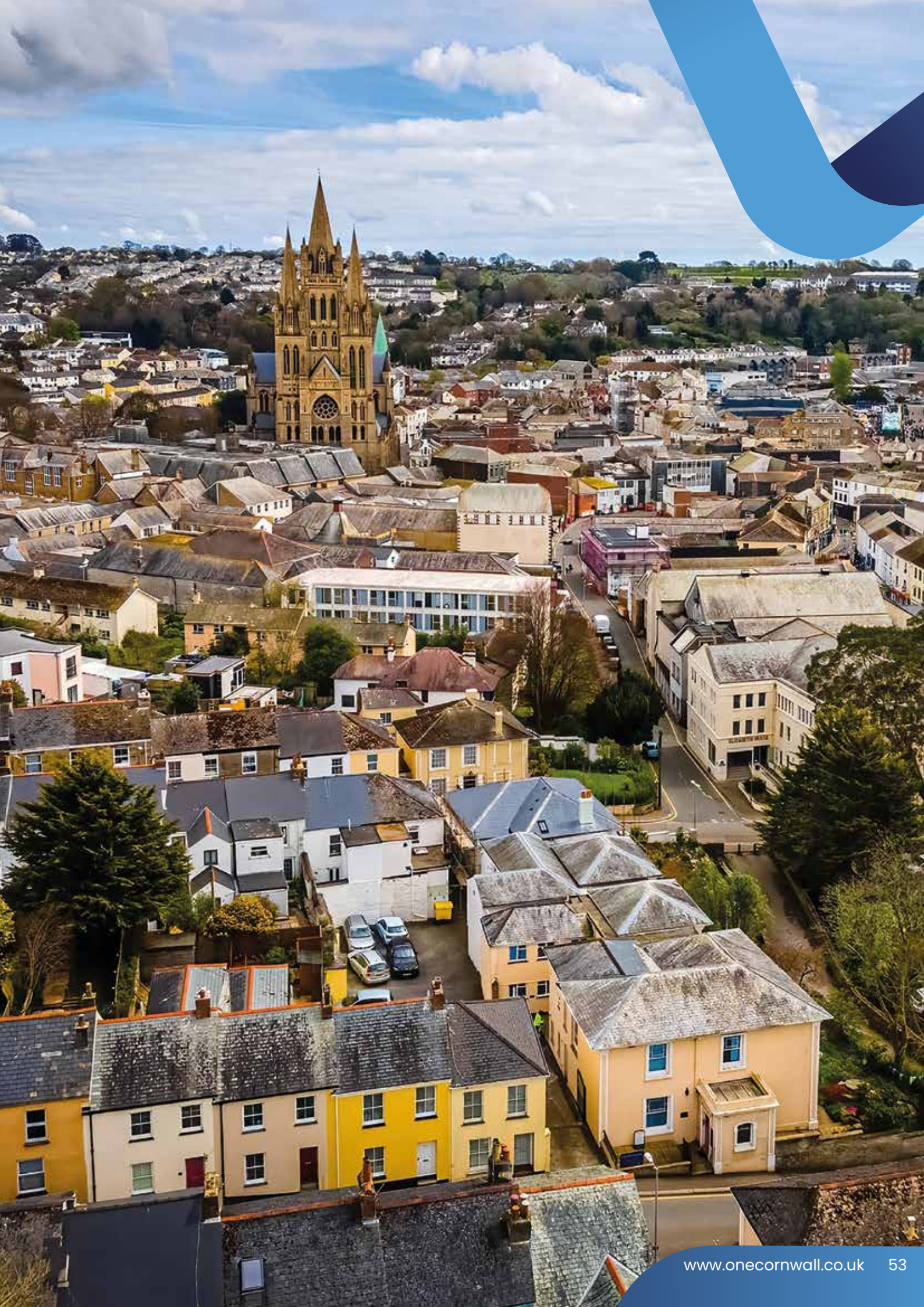
Temporal Constraints

The research was conducted during a period of significant change in teacher training policy and practice, with new ITT requirements and funding arrangements being implemented. This dynamic context limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of specific interventions.

Recruitment Challenges

The research itself faced participant recruitment challenges, with difficulties in securing participation from all stakeholder groups despite all ITT providers supporting the research from the outset through the OneCornwall ITT Providers Network. This was not considered to have an effect on the validity of the data collected, and the ITT provider data was considered representative of the population. The trainee data provided insights from a range of trainees that were used for illumination.

Despite these limitations, the research provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing rural teacher recruitment, with the limitations themselves offering important evidence about the systemic challenges faced by rural education systems.

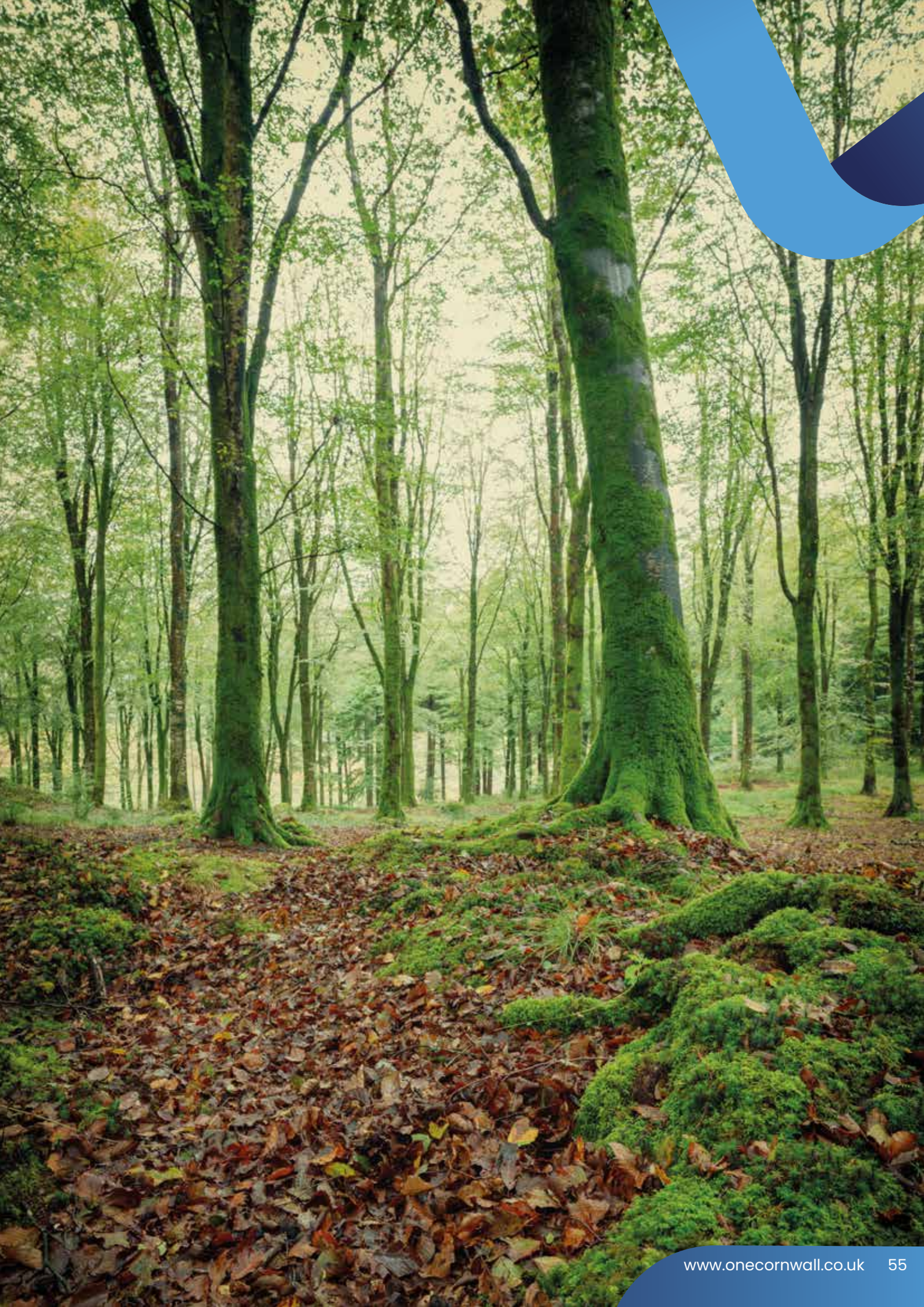




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