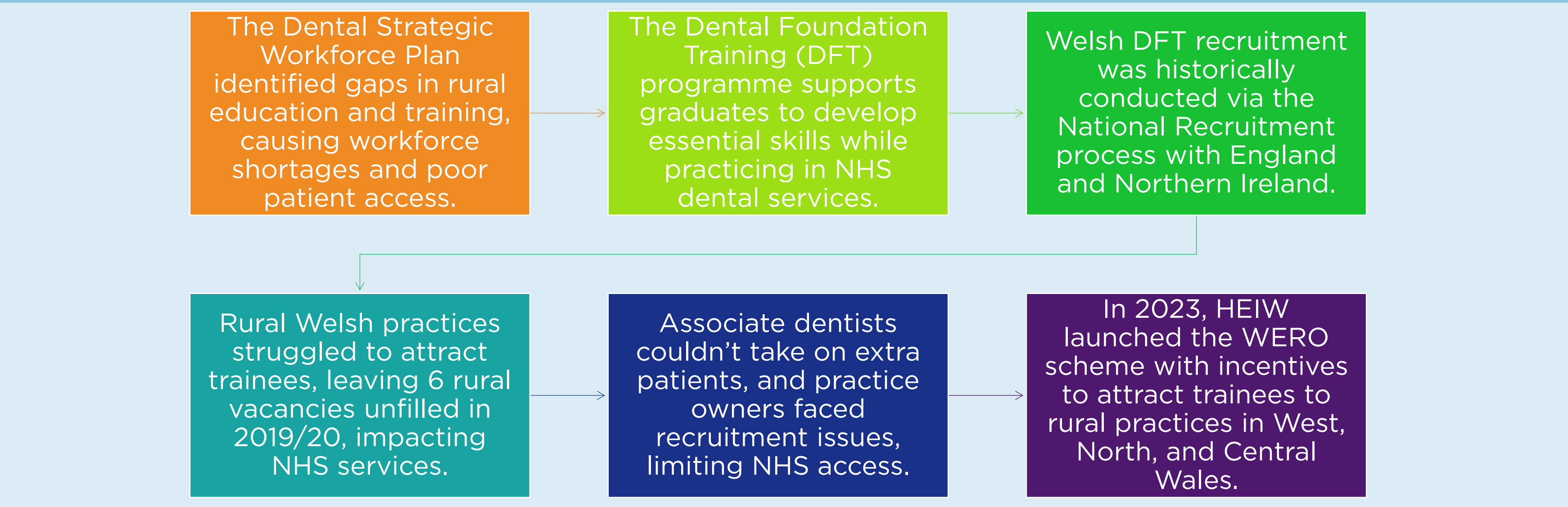


DFT WERO: A Targeted Approach to Strengthening the Rural Dental Workforce in Wales

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Introduction



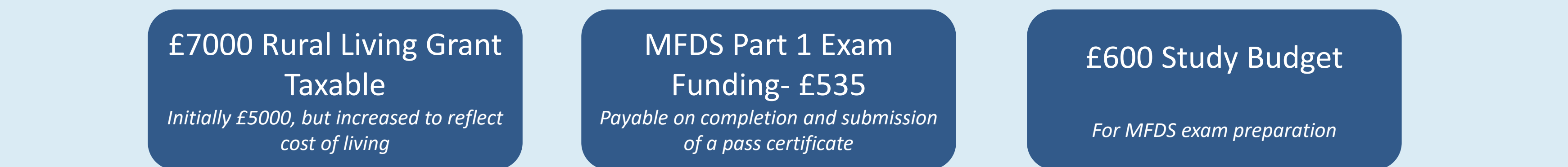
Programme Development

Outline

In the 2023 recruitment cycle, twelve historically hard-to-fill posts were allocated to DFT WERO instead of NRO. This number increased to 15 in 2024, with a further expansion to 16 planned for 2025. Participating practices underwent a rigorous approval process and were supported by experienced Educational Supervisors to ensure high-quality training.

The scheme was strategically promoted to final-year dental students through targeted communication efforts. Applicants applied via a local recruitment process with an application form on Oriel and eligible applicants were invited to interview. Successful candidates were matched to their preferred placements based on interview scores before NRO. To support sustainable retention of these trainees in Wales, the initiative prioritised UK graduates who trained in Wales, are Welsh domiciled, or have an existing connection to Wales.

The WERO Incentives



Benefits



Proven Strategies

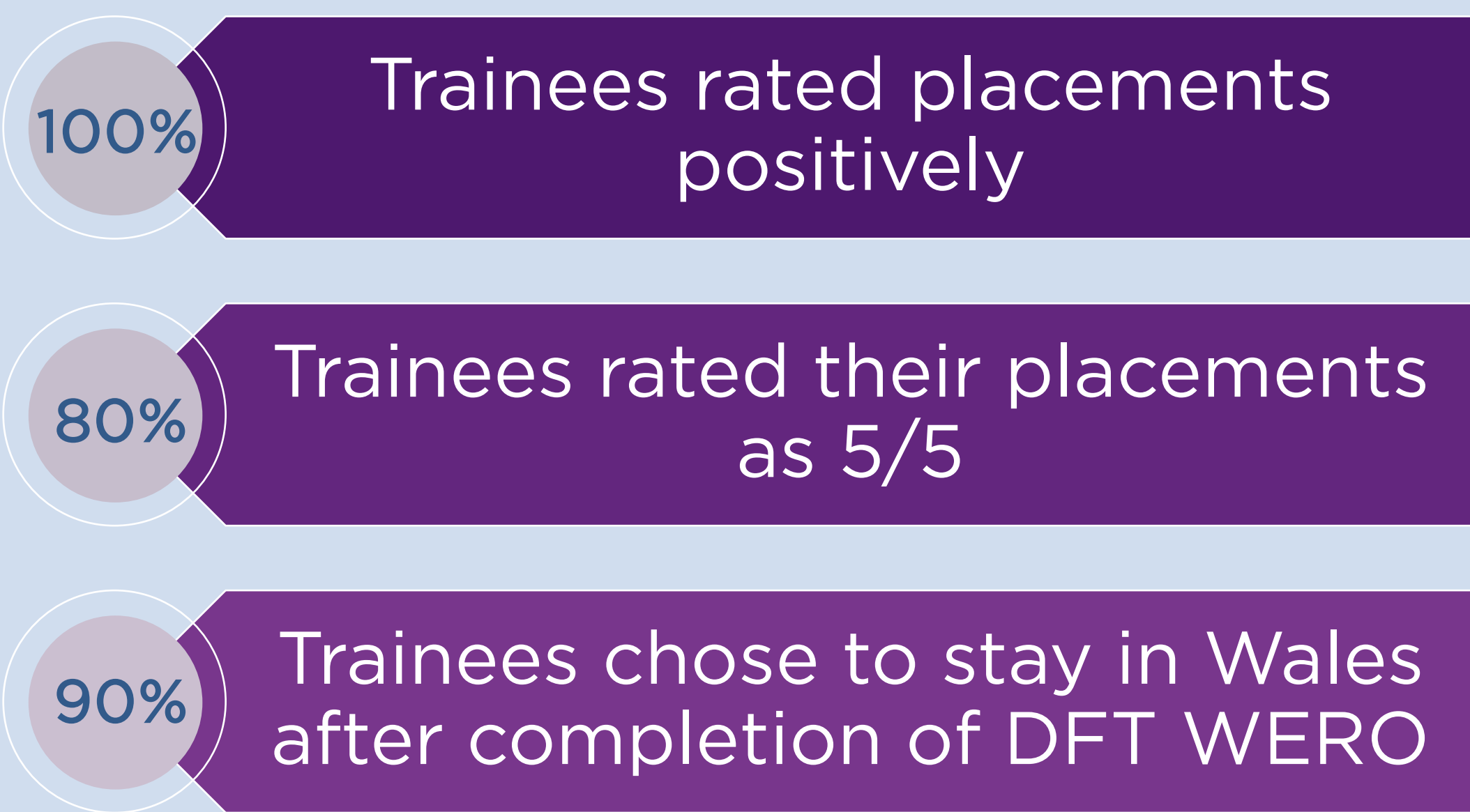
WERO incentives were designed based on successful models like the Dental Recruitment Incentive Scheme (DRIS), Scotland's Recruitment & Retention Allowance, and GP-focused initiatives like the Targeted Enhanced Recruitment Scheme (TERS) in Cumbria. By combining financial incentives with professional development opportunities and enhanced support systems, WERO aims to attract and retain skilled dentists, ensuring improved access to high-quality care in underserved areas.

Cost

The funding envelope was kept within the DFT budget by using unspent monies associated with unfilled training posts. The WERO Incentive cost to HEIW = £8,135 per training post.

Outcome

Launched in September 2023, the pilot achieved full recruitment and delivered excellent training experiences:



Following the scheme's success, it was re-launched in September 2024, with testimonials from the new cohort showcasing outstanding training experiences.

"I applied to the DFT WERO scheme because one of my Liverpool tutors recommended it to me. I'm so thankful I did because I've learned so much... I've gained lots of clinical experience and become a more skilled practitioner. We've taken on more difficult cases, such as complex endodontics or surgical extractions, because secondary care isn't as accessible in rural areas."

"A brilliant and friendly team. The practice was modern, well-equipped, and if I needed anything different, they were more than happy to order it in. My Educational Supervisor was fantastic, always on hand to answer any questions and tailor tutorials to suit my needs."

"A great team to work with and extremely supportive! I've been given lots of training, freedom to learn, and the chance to build confidence in treating patients."

Building on its success, the scheme is set to expand further in September 2025 to 16 posts. There is also potential to introduce two Oral Surgery/Service Delivery posts as a second-year extension (WERO+1), offering a Dental Core Training (DCT) year with one day per week in a specialist practice. This is expected to support the long-term retention of trainees in these rural areas, strengthening workforce stability and enhancing service delivery.

Impact

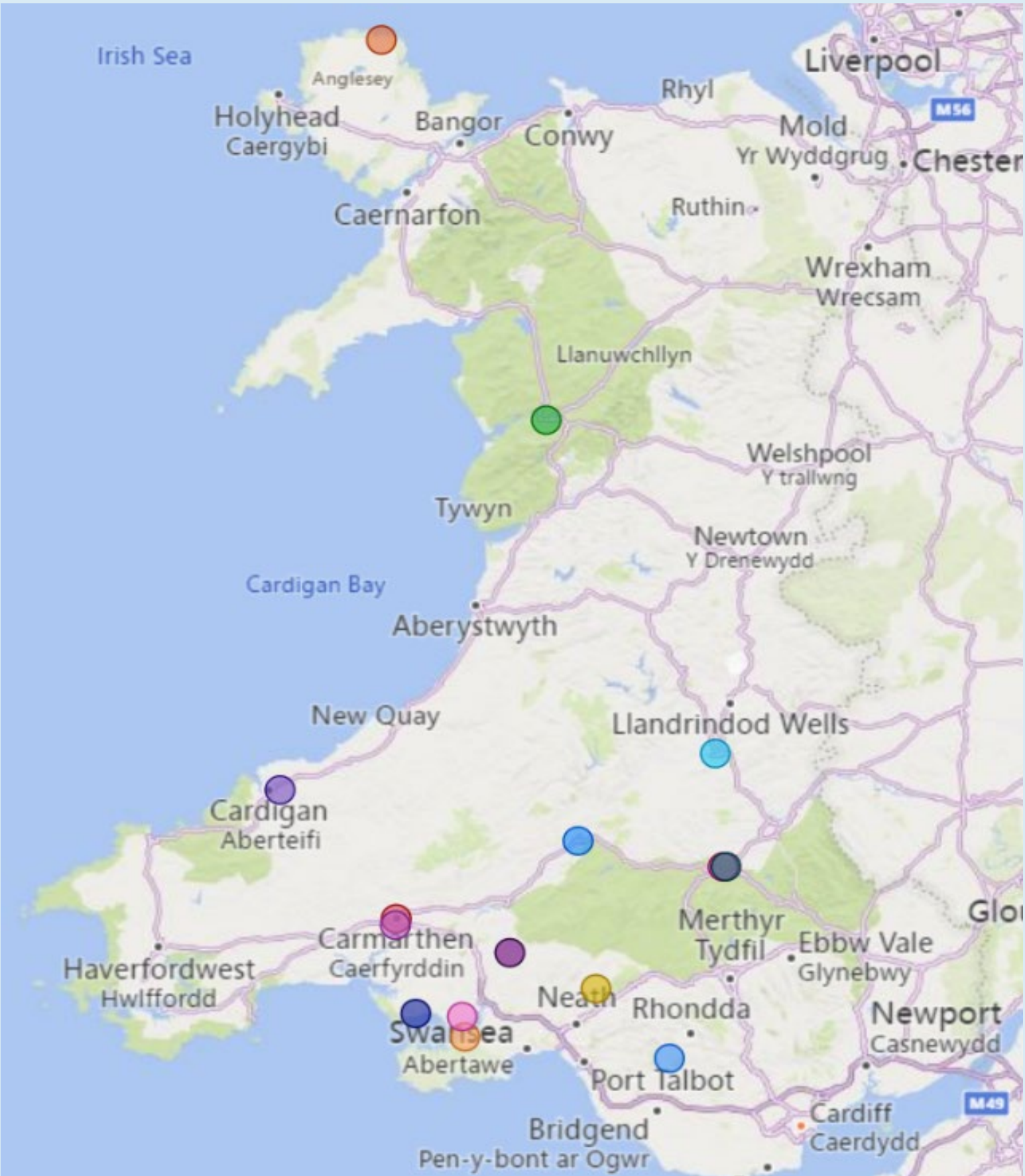


Figure 1: Locations of DFT WERO practices (2024 cohort)

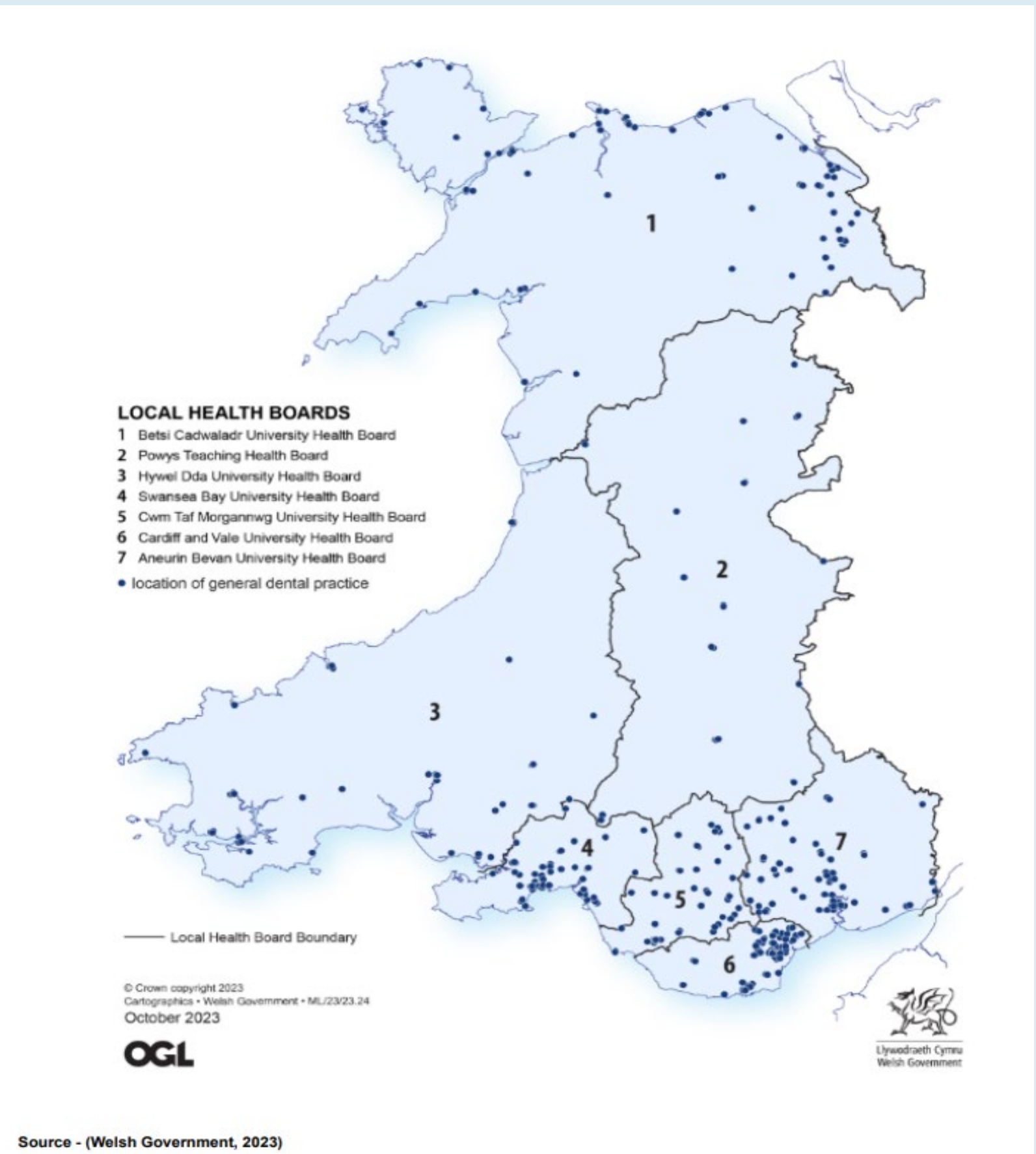


Figure 2: Locations of GDP practices in Wales (Welsh Government, 2023)

The DFT WERO practices are strategically located in regions with already limited NHS dental services, often described as 'dental deserts'. Figure 1 shows the locations of the DFT WERO practices in 2024 while Figure 2 shows the locations of GDP practices in Wales in 2024. By placing trainees in these underserved areas, the initiative has directly improved service delivery, increasing the availability of NHS dental appointments for local communities. This targeted approach not only helps to address the immediate need for dental care but also contributes to reducing long-standing health inequalities.

Rural populations often face significant barriers to accessing healthcare, including long travel distances and a shortage of local providers. By embedding trainees within these communities, DFT WERO ensures more equitable access to essential dental services, promoting better oral health outcomes and supporting the long-term sustainability of NHS dentistry in remote areas.

Conclusion



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