

FROM READING
TO BANGOR:

Elliott
Aboagye



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When Elliot from Reading came to Wales as an undergrad, he loved it so much it was a natural choice to stay and study for his PGCE here too. Now he's on a mission to inject a fresh buzz into one of the curriculum's core subjects.

"When people think of English as a subject they normally think of the literature side – but the part I always enjoyed the most was linguistics, and the language itself.

"In truth, I never visited Bangor University before I applied and began my undergrad there – I just looked at places as far away from home in Reading as possible to get a bit of independence! So when I saw a university in North Wales, surrounded by mountains on one side and the sea on the other, I thought 'perfect!'.

"I enjoyed my time at Bangor so much that when I decided to do my Masters, I never considered leaving. And when I then decided to do a PGCE, again it just felt right to stay here – much to my dad's disappointment, as I think he wanted me to come closer to home to save himself some petrol money as it's a five hour drive!"

It's fair to say Bangor is quite different from Elliott's home town of Reading.

"For starters, Reading is flat. Bangor, on the other hand, is one big hill. There was one hill in particular on the way up to my first year halls that taxi drivers would just laugh at you for attempting!

"But everyone is so friendly and welcoming here in Wales – I felt far from home but never far from friends."

So what made Elliott decide to train as a teacher? His old English teacher had a lot to do with his passion for his subject.

"Miss O'Sullivan-Dale really helped me to enjoy English in secondary school. She had the ability to make you feel rewarded for trying, even if you weren't a top student. And she had a knack for discipline that I really hope I can replicate when I'm a teacher – she wasn't authoritarian, she was cool, but you knew at the same time that you couldn't get away with being lazy or complacent in her classes."

In fact, there's a few lessons from his own school days that Elliott is keen to take into his teaching career.

"I remember when I was at school, a lot of pupils hated English. The trouble is, it's one of the core subjects that you have to take, so automatically that's going to make it a hard sell and it can have a bit of a reputation as being boring.

"I want to change that – I think just because English is a subject you have to take, doesn't mean it's a subject that needs to feel like a tick box. It is really interesting and varied, but you need to have a teacher that is willing to put that extra effort into bringing it to life and choosing to emphasise the parts that young people can relate to most.

"For instance, I wrote my Masters dissertation on one of my favourite albums: To Pimp a Butterfly by Kendrick Lamar. Lamar talks about the African American experience in his lyrics and for me his words are just as worthy of analysis and consideration as any formal piece of prose or poetry – it's just a different medium because it's music, but it's no less valid.

"I think if we as teachers can use our freedoms with the new curriculum in Wales to tailor what we teach more, and pick out examples we feel will resonate with our pupils, this will only help to engage them more and create a buzz about English – and the power of our words – again."

What's Elliott's advice for other prospective trainee teachers?

"You've got to remember to build in time for planning your lessons. You get thrown into the classroom quite quickly when you start your PGCE, and trust me it's pretty terrifying if you've not prepared as much as you should have!

"So my top tip is to plan your lessons in advance – not the night before, which at uni I was certainly guilty of doing with my essays – so it's trying to change any bad habits you might have slipped into. You'll have a much more pleasant experience if you do."

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