Despite the drive for inclusivity in our HEIs, those with dependants (usually parents) often need to overcome considerable challenges in order to complete the requirements of their PGCE year. This paper aims to distinguish common themes identified by such trainees across two university provisions in order to better understand and find ways to support trainees and mitigate these difficulties.

The current government has consistently promoted social mobility and fairness as part of its rhetoric. However, many challenges to achieving a completely inclusive education system persist. Brooks (2011) has argued that; compared with other groups of ‘non traditional’ students, student parents have been given limited consideration, both in terms of policy intervention and of research.

In order to gain success in “achieving the priorities of teacher education” it is imperative that we are able to select and train outstanding candidates for our courses based on proven achievement, ability and potential, regardless of background or social status. Yet those trainees who also have responsibility for their own children often face insurmountable challenges when considering teacher training programmes.

Moreau and Kerner (2012) have argued that research that aims to dispel difficulties around student-parent recruitment and retention is timely; both because these students are currently over-represented in groups facing disadvantage in Higher Education and also because due to a changing socio-economic climate they signify a rapidly growing subgroup that is not presently matched by intervention or research.

The PGCE route into teacher training is often a favoured route for student-parents as they are attracted by a perception that upheaval in family life and financial sacrifice will be relatively short term. Yet the intensive nature and demands of the programme may also highlight and intensify many of the challenges faced by these trainees.

This paper will build on previous research undertaken by co-presenter Dr. Lisa Murtagh and will discuss inter-institutional research undertaken on two primary PGCE courses in HEIs in the UK. Research discussed will draw on innovative data collection methods such as visual narratives and will build case studies through focus groups, interviews and video diaries. It will also consider how relevant and effective HEIs are felt to be in supporting the needs of student-teachers; proposing actions to mitigate some of these difficulties.