

3RD EDITION

# THE TRAINEE TEACHER'S HANDBOOK

A COMPANION FOR INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING

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# 19

## GETTING YOUR FIRST JOB

**In this chapter, we will explore:**

- **When and how to apply for your first job**
- **The application process**
- **The 'golden rules' of interviews**

### INTRODUCTION

When you are in the middle of your teacher training year, it is very easy to forget about anything that comes afterwards, but getting your first job is a rite of passage that can get your teaching career off to a flying start. It is an exciting time and the good news is that, for the past few years, demand for new teachers in many parts of the country has exceeded supply, so it is often the case that trainees are offered employment before the end of their studies. There is a temptation to apply for the first job you see, but that is not always the right thing to do. As with so many recruitment processes, it is all about getting the *right* job, rather than the *first* job you are offered. This is something you need to think hard about, and the purpose of this chapter is to get you ready for this decision.

### APPLYING FOR YOUR FIRST JOB

During your teacher training, you will have been exposed to a number of different environments that will help you make your final decision about which job is right for you. For those of you in compulsory education, you would have completed placements in at least two contrasting settings, while those of you within post-compulsory education would have seen a great variety of teaching styles and locations to suit the needs of the wide range of subjects and students in this phase.

The key thing to remember when thinking about your first job is that everyone's needs are different. Sometimes, it is easy to think that an 'outstanding' school or college in an affluent area would be a

better option than somewhere perceived as being more challenging, yet that is not always the case. The pressures, demands and rewards in contrasting organisations are often very different; that is why it is very important to think about your requirements before starting to apply for jobs.

For those of you who work within post-compulsory education, there is often a bewildering array of choice. You need to consider whether your expertise is best suited to sixth-form colleges, general Further Education colleges, pupil referral units, prison education, adult education or any one of the many other forms of education that exist in the sector (Figure 19.1).



Figure 19.1 Job interview

## REFLECTION

The purpose of this reflective feature is to get you to think about what you are looking for in your first job. For example, do you need to consider location, subject area or level of challenge?

Some things you may have considered are:

- **Geography:** Do you want to stay in your local area, or are you willing to travel further afield? If you rely on public transport to get to work are there any areas that are easy to get to? Maybe consider other options such as working abroad or specialising in a particular area.
- **Subject:** The next step is to identify the subject that you are going to put forward as your main subject. For some of you that will be easy, for example, teachers of mathematics rarely teach any other subject, but for other subjects, the choice is more complicated. A teacher of Sociology might

be asked to teach Business Studies. So, it is a good idea to think about what you would be able to offer.

- **Education phase:** For some people, this is an easy choice. Most primary trained teachers work in that phase, but for other people the choice is trickier. While completing your teacher training you might have particularly enjoyed one or more age groups and this will help inform your choice. A word of warning though: never apply for a phase if you have not experienced it. It is very easy to make assumptions and, aside from the difficulty you will have in explaining your lack of experience, you might find that your initial thoughts were incorrect. A common misconception is that teaching students in college is 'easier' as they want to study the subjects they have chosen. While that may be true for some students, it is certainly not the case with all the classes that you might teach.
- **Challenges:** Another factor to be aware of is the challenges you will face in each organisation and whether they will suit you or not. So, for example, a school or college serving a deprived area will have particular challenges, with teachers and lecturers coping with a lack of money and a variety of social problems.
- **Part-time or full-time:** This decision might be one that you are not able to make, but for some people working part-time at the start of their career represents a good way of easing themselves into the profession. This is especially true in the post-compulsory sector and represents a way of reducing the pressure that you have in your first year as a qualified professional.

## WHEN TO LOOK FOR YOUR FIRST JOB

The majority of people aim to make sure that they have a job by the end of their teacher training year. So, a good idea is to look at vacancies from Christmas onwards. Remember that most teachers are required to give a term's notice when leaving, so, as a result, jobs for September will be advertised comparatively early in the year.

Increasingly, jobs tend to be advertised online; it is a good idea to set up an alert that will email you when jobs that meet your specifications are posted. The *Times Educational Supplement* (now known as the *TES* and available online at **tes.com**) is the longest-established source of new jobs but do not neglect other sources of information. Schools and colleges will advertise vacancies on their own websites while other good sources include LinkedIn, **jobs.ac.uk** and also your own university's social media accounts.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A JOB ADVERT

By now you should have a clear idea about the type of job and the location of the job that you want. However, it is always a good idea to take a very close look at the job advertisement before applying to avoid disappointment later. Make sure that you are applying for a role that is suitable for a newly qualified teacher or lecturer and check to see if it is a fixed-term contract or whether it is open-ended. Other things to check are whether it is full-time or proportional (often expressed as a decimal, so one where you teach half a standard timetable, would be described as a 0.5 post) and also check if there are any additional responsibilities attached to the job.

## ACTIVITY

Select a job advertisement from one of the sources that are listed above. Make sure that it is a job that suits your skills.

Before looking at the advertisement in detail spend some time thinking about how you view the teaching role and come up with a few words that describe your philosophical approach – what are your key values and beliefs and how do you see your role? When you have done this, set this to one side and look again at the advertisement.

Highlight the qualities requested in the advert and then separate them into personal and professional aspects. Reflect on whether you match those qualities and also whether the words mentioned in the recruitment advertisement match those of your own beliefs. Remember that it is not about getting a job, it is about getting the right job, and if your belief structure does not match that of the organisation then you might struggle.

If there is a match, then this would be a job that you should think about applying for.

## THE APPLICATION PROCESS

When most schools and colleges were controlled by the local education authority, the application process was relatively straightforward. A common application form was used, and a lot of the information could be transferred if more than one application was needed. Sadly, this is no longer the case and so it is difficult to generalise about the processes, although there are a few general rules which you should follow when applying.

## THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

There is an art to writing a personal statement for a teaching job and once mastered, it should not take too long to complete. One golden rule is to make sure that you don't just use a generic statement for each application – make sure that each statement is tailored for the specific job and that you reflect on the qualities the advertisement asks for.

The structure of the statement tends to be fairly standard. So, it is a good idea to follow these steps.

- **The introduction.** Make sure that you give your reasons for wanting to teach at the school or college. Be specific and show that you have done your research – look at the organisation's website, their Ofsted report and any other information you can find and convey your enthusiasm and motivation for applying for the job. Remember not to write what you think they want to hear, write your real reasons: you want to be selected for who you are, rather than who you pretend to be.
- **Knowledge and understanding.** The next section allows you to match your own knowledge and understanding to that of the person specification. As with any application process, it is vital to ensure that you cover all aspects of the person specification and it is also important to show how you have matched each aspect, so make sure that you give lots of examples. As well as that, it is a

good idea to include some comments showing your philosophy. Schools and colleges are looking for people who can work independently from early on, so show that you understand the role of the teacher and make sure that you give concise examples to illustrate this understanding.

- **About yourself.** Once you have addressed the key aspects of the job, make sure that you include information about yourself. A good idea is to outline your personal and professional qualities concisely and demonstrate how these link to working in education. Another part to include is to note whether you have any additional skills which could be useful either in the class or in extra-curricular activities – these could include speaking another language, sport, music or art.
- **Conclusion.** Do not forget to include a conclusion in your personal statement. Too many applicants end their statements abruptly and this disrupts the flow. Conclude in a way that will make the person reading the application want to interview you and make sure you say why you are an excellent candidate for the job.

Once you have written the personal statement, put it away for a day or two and then read it again. This makes it much easier to spot any errors or mistakes that might detract from the application. Make sure that you check all spelling and grammar and reflect on the flow of the statement. Reading it aloud helps you focus on what you have written and whether it flows in a satisfactory manner.

## ACTIVITY

Once you have read the previous section, go back to your original advertisement and go through the process of writing a personal statement for the job. When you have finished, show it to someone who you feel will be constructively critical, discuss it and by the end of the process you should have a personal statement that you can use as a model in the future.

## THE GOLDEN RULES OF THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The final section of this chapter provides a few golden rules to follow once you have heard that you have been called for an interview.

1. **Prepare for the interview.** By that we don't just mean organise your micro-teach or presentation – instead learn everything you can about the organisation and be ready to ask questions. Interview panels tend to look favourably upon candidates who clearly have done their research about the organisation.
2. **Show off your teaching skills when invited to do a micro-teach.** The micro-teach is something that is often the source of some concern during the recruitment process, but it also represents the opportunity to show off your teaching skills. Read the brief carefully and prepare something that is interesting and innovative. Do not do too much teacher-talk but instead remember everything you have learnt about structuring active lessons – show off your great

teaching skills. We cannot stress enough how important it is that you make it interactive – involve the panel in your lesson!

3. **Be organised.** Plan your route to the interview before the day and aim to arrive early. That way you will be far more relaxed than if you turn up at the last minute. Make sure that you are appropriately dressed for the job and that you have all the materials you need if presenting anything. A good idea is to make sure that you have a Plan B in case there are any problems with technology.
4. **Whatever the outcome, learn from the experience.** Education is a small world and the way you are in one interview is likely to impact your next one. Thank everyone at the end of the day for their time and if you are unsuccessful then always ask for feedback. Sometimes the reasons behind not being chosen are minor and relate to something that you can change next time.

Finally, good luck with the job hunting and remember to focus on getting the RIGHT job for your needs.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter covers the essentials of getting your first job and was designed to help you think about what is best for you. Given the current shortage of teachers, it is important to realise that you are likely to have a degree of choice in your job hunting but don't treat this as an excuse to cut corners. Getting a teaching job requires organisation and planning on your part and this will mean that your first job is likely to be the right job for you (Figure 19.2).

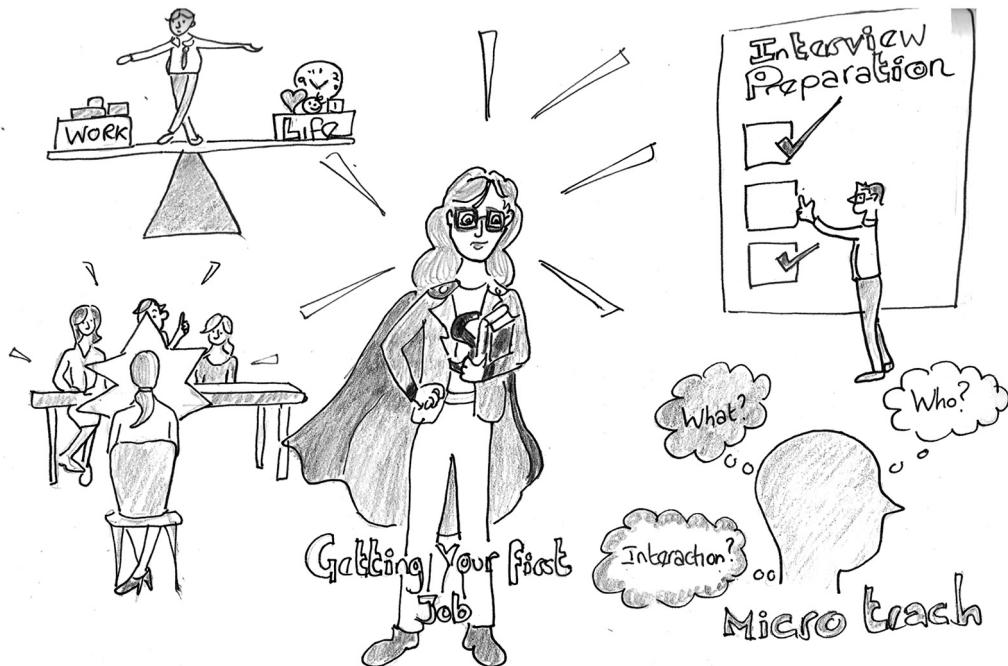


Figure 19.2 Chapter mindmap

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

The key message from this chapter is that job searching requires a great deal of thought and preparation. Before applying, it is important that you are clear in your head as to what sort of job you want, where it would ideally be and what you will be teaching. Think about this early on in the course and start to plan. What steps can you put in place to ensure you take a structured approach to your job search?

## PUTTING THE THEORY INTO PRACTICE

This feature covers the essentials of getting your first job and will help you to think about applying it to your own practice. This resource can be photocopied and used as a revision tool or a prompt for discussion with your peers.

### HATTIE AND MICRO-TEACHING

Hattie's (2012) study of what works in teaching remains highly influential and one of the techniques he advocated was 'micro-teaching'. This is the name given to a short teaching session, normally designed to achieve a single objective. Many interviews will ask you to complete a micro-teach, and it remains an excellent way of showing your teaching skills.

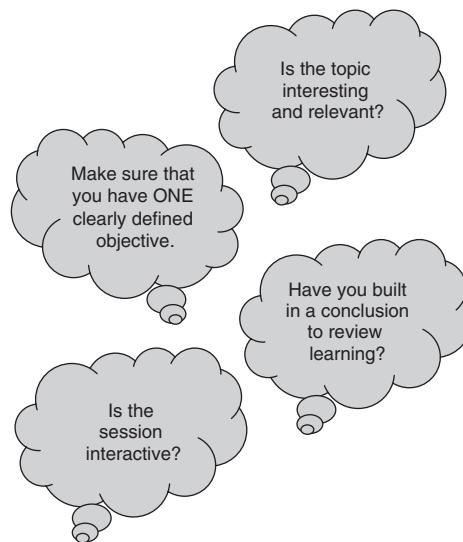
Hattie (2012) suggests that the key points of a good micro-teach session are that the topic should be an interesting one, the objective clear, active learning should be used and there should be time for reflection.

These points can be used as a guideline when designing a session. Using an andragagogical approach (in other words, using knowledge that is already within the brains of students) can be highly beneficial and can help give students confidence to complete the task.

Knowing how much time is allocated is an important skill as one of the main problems for teachers is making sure that you fit everything in and avoid doing too much.

### PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

When designing your micro-teach think about the following:



## SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER READING

The best suggestion we can give you for further reading is to make sure that you read the *Times Educational Supplement* every week as well as the education pages in the *Guardian*.

## REFERENCE

**Hattie, J** (2012) *Visible Learning for Teachers*. Abingdon: Routledge.