

2

Making the most of your time before the course begins

Graham Birrell



chapter objectives

This chapter:

- provides some constructive ideas as to why and how you should prepare for your PGCE;
- will help you develop a personal philosophy towards teaching.

Like all challenges, PGCEs shouldn't be entered into lightly and without forethought or preparation. Mentally, you need to get in the right place, but intellectually and academically you also need to get ready. This chapter is exactly what it promises and although it's most likely to be useful to you if you have already been accepted onto a PGCE, even if you're still only at the 'thinking about it' stage, I'm sure that you will find it helpful as it will give you an excellent idea of what's involved before the course even starts. Hopefully, you'll find it's full of useful advice and ideas to make the absolute most of the period before you start your PGCE, so that when the course begins you aren't just ready, but are actually one step ahead.

Developing your understanding and philosophy

I've talked to quite a few programme directors of primary PGCEs and experience in school is the thing they cite as the most important factor in firstly getting on a PGCE, and then being prepared for both the course and for life as a teacher. This of course makes complete sense, how else can you tell if you enjoy school life or if you have the skills and attributes required? For those simple reasons, almost all primary PGCEs stipulate school experience as an entry requirement. Furthermore, once accepted, most primary PGCEs demand a further observation period in schools before the course starts.

However, think very carefully about how to get the absolute most out of your observation experience, as not all students use it wisely. Universities that have a one or two week pre-course observation 'placement' built in to their PGCE will almost certainly send you a pack of guidance, full of activities you could undertake, and my advice is to follow this closely as it will have been put together by people who really know what they're talking about after having lived and breathed primary education for a very long time. Later on in this chapter are some examples of the sort of activities you should undertake when observing; but more than just structured tasks, you should use this time to think very carefully about your *philosophy* of teaching.



reflective task – philosophy

1. As honestly as you can, on a piece of paper right down your top five priorities as a teacher. What will be important to you when you are teaching? What will be the signs that you are doing a good job?
2. Now put them in order with the most important to you at the top.
3. Study them carefully; what do you think they tell you about what you value most in teaching?

For example, did you include a well behaved class on your list? If so, how high up the list was it? What about pupil learning? Was that higher than good behaviour? If not, do you value good behaviour more than learning? Or do you think the latter can only be achieved after the former has been established?

What sort of learning do you value? Do you think that children should learn lots of subject knowledge or more skills, concepts and attitudes? For example, this is an area hotly contested by people interested in history in schools; e.g. should children learn all about the key events in the reign of Henry VIII or that there are different interpretations of the merits (or lack of them) of Henry as a king?

Before people start PGCEs, many of them have a fairly clear idea of what sort of teacher they want to be. In the early days of teaching, many new students see simply controlling the class as a clear measure of success. This is perfectly understandable, but the obvious next question is just how important is it? For some it will quickly become secondary to other factors, such as pupil enjoyment or empowerment, but for others it will continue to become central to their thinking. Many students' ideas of what 'good teaching' actually is stems from their own experiences of teaching, either running in parallel or in complete contrast. For example, students from fairly traditional educational backgrounds often strongly believe in traditional approaches to teaching, or in contrast strongly question them.

Relating back to the reflective task, some teachers you will observe will take a very overtly controlling grip on their class, insisting on silence or near silence, the 'working hum', while their class works. Other teachers will have what appears to be seething, teeming chaos going on, which despite what it looks like seems to work for them. Some teachers believe firmly in closely directed tasks with pretty much fixed outcomes and expectations, e.g. children will walk out knowing x and y. Others believe in child-directed, independent activities with a more risk-taking approach where outcomes aren't fixed in advance, e.g. children may walk out knowing x and y, but possibly also z too.

You will have your own views on the approach you feel is best, and speaking personally I believe it is better to have some idea of what sort of teacher you want to be and to be passionate about it, rather than have no idea at all and be rather apathetic. I would definitely challenge you to at least think about what sort of teacher you aim to become, and you can use your observation in school to begin to form an opinion.

However, it's important to be open-minded. Don't be so blinded by your own beliefs about what 'good teaching' is that you aren't prepared to consider alternative strategies. This is where observation is so crucial. Experience in the classroom is simply vital in not only learning some fantastic tips and ideas, such as how to get children changed for PE with the minimum amount of fuss (and this remains one of the biggest challenges for any primary teacher, especially those in the early years!); but also in terms of observing some of the many different styles and approaches that you will come across in primary classrooms.

For this reason, try and observe as many teachers as you possibly can with as many different age ranges as you possibly can, in as many schools as you can.

You may or may not be surprised to learn that primary schools can have very different ethos, perspectives and priorities. Sometimes you can learn a lot about these by simply walking through the front door. University tutors get fairly good at judging this from visiting their students in many different sorts of

schools whilst on school placement. However, even the inexperienced can learn things quickly, just be willing to look about you and take things in.

For example, one school I heard of recently (Claxton, 2009) had a display in the foyer of one class's attempt at making rockets. They were fairly tatty, not particularly good rockets and clearly weren't likely to be very effective in taking their payloads into orbit. Not such a good first impression then? Well, actually no, because on closer inspection, next to each rocket was an analysis from each pupil as to where they had gone wrong and how they had corrected their errors when making the final and finished product. These were simply prototypes, and if you wanted to see the final thing you were directed to their classroom. This told you a great deal about their teacher (and the school's validation of his or her teaching by having this display as the first thing that all new visitors to the school saw), who valued the process as much as the outcome, who considered errors and mistakes were to be celebrated and learnt from, and who showed how effective design comes from planning and persistence.

Clearly the physical environment is important and not just in terms of attractive displays; for example, how are the tables and chairs arranged? Rows suggest the teacher prefers a more traditional approach, groups suggest a more discussion-led style. However, what is perhaps more important than the physical environment is the emotional environment. How are the children spoken to? Are their contributions valued? What is the reaction to their errors? Do they seem at ease in each other's and the adults' company? All these things can range from school to school.

You can learn a great deal about teaching from simply observing the day to day operation of a school. Just the same as Helen Taylor comments in chapter 4, even to this day, every time I go into a new school I learn something about teaching and about schools. I regularly challenge my own beliefs and question assumptions. To give one small, but hopefully interesting, example, I go to Germany every year to see students who are on a student teacher exchange programme. One of the immediate things I noticed the first time I went was that at break-times in every school I visited, the children behaved in the corridors exactly the same as they would to the playground; so you can imagine – chaos and when the bell went they simply ambled back into their classes without being told or directed class at a time as you would see in the overwhelming majority of British primary schools.

Now, we shouldn't generalise from only a small number of classes and especially when there may be a myriad of cultural and educational factors that were hidden and unknown to me, but it nonetheless challenged my perceptions on one very minor aspect of 'effective teaching' and whether the norm in this country's schools is really effective. I similarly challenge you to use your observation time to confront your own beliefs on what successful schools and teachers look like.

However, as well as thinking more esoterically and theoretically about some general aspects of what you observe taking place in school, there are some very clear practical tasks you could and should engage in that will help you to gain a clearer understanding of how to be a teacher before the course even starts. As I said earlier, each University will provide some suggested tasks and you should follow these, but examples of these are below.



key points

Some suggestions for practical observation tasks

- Ask the school for a copy of the behaviour policy. Ask yourself: why is it written? What is its objective? Who wrote it? How often is it reviewed? Who is it given to? Is it followed in the school? If so, how do you think this has been achieved?
- Ask your teacher for a copy of a medium term plan. Annotate it with your thoughts. Was it written by an individual or team? It is purely about one subject or is it cross-curricular? How does it cater for differing abilities? How does it plan for progression, e.g. lessons building on each other in stages?
- Observe one child closely for 30 minutes. Devise your own way of recording the child's behaviour during that period e.g. working or playing alone, talking to another child, interacting with the teacher, waiting etc. Which behaviours predominated? What factors affected this? Did the teacher influence the behaviour in any way? (Remember that 'behaviours' can be positive as well as negative). Try this again in a contrasting age phase. Did the behaviours differ in the two phases? If so, why?
- Identify some children who are having difficulty with a task. Identify the nature of the difficulty. Talk to the children about it to discover their understanding. Reflect on this discussion in terms of why pupils find some tasks challenging and how they approach overcoming them.
- Observe how boys and girls behave in a lesson. Do they interact differently with children of the same and opposite gender? Do they gain the same amount of attention and interaction from the teacher? A simple tally chart could reveal some interesting results.

For more information on observation, chapter 4 has some excellent guidance for your actual teaching placements.

Here are some words of advice from a former PGCE student, who suggests some ways to make the most of the time you have before you start the course.



case study

Mushtaq

Mushtaq was a highly successful student teacher, something his tutors felt could in large part be attributed to his reflective approach.

'It can be tempting when you first receive the confirmation that you are enrolled on a teacher training course to do absolutely nothing. I certainly did...for about two days, and then the panic set in! 'I wasn't very good at maths at school', 'I can't remember what I learnt in science', 'the last time I did history I was 13!' I found that it was a good idea to write down the things that were worrying me and jot down some thoughts about where I could find help with them.

Books and the internet are great, but if I had to recommend just one thing to do before starting the course it's to talk; pick out two or three things that you really want to focus on understanding before you start your course - don't rely on picking up everything once the course has started. I wish I had made some contacts at interview day, this would have given me the opportunity to get in touch with some other trainees in the same boat.

Looking back at my preparation I think I probably should have tried to improve my subject knowledge a little more. I would recommend spending some time brushing up on the areas that you know are weaker in before the course starts. Trying to do this once the course has started is really hard due to the demands on your time.

Whilst I enjoyed the observation placement I did not make the most of the opportunity. I think it is vital that you go in there with a clear idea of what you want to get out of it. I recommend noting maybe three things you really want to focus on, like; what's it like in a year 6 classroom?, how does the teacher deliver literacy?, even how does the staffroom work! Also, don't be afraid to ask things. This may take a couple of days to build up the confidence, but if you are professional and choose your time I found that most staff are more than willing to help. A proactive approach will help you arrive at your first teaching placement better prepared and ready to get stuck in.'

Do your research, be informed

One of the great myths that many people hold about training to be a teacher is that whatever sort of course you take will be dominated by being told how to teach, learning lots of excellent tips for how to get children to do what you want and engaging in a series of University sessions that go through the sorts of things you could try out in schools. The fact that PGCEs aren't like this in reality comes as quite a shock to some, as does the significant emphasis on research and theory. Most sessions will involve some sort of reading beforehand of recommended books, chapters or articles and most students will learn much about teaching from doing it.

Get yourself a head start and engage in some reading before the course begins; your University will have their own recommended reading lists and you should follow these. Clearly this makes sense in terms of being informed about some important background reading about teaching. However, more than this, it is likely to make the start of the course, and quite possibly the rest of it too, an awful lot easier. Your tutors will make some reasonable assumptions about you in the first few sessions on the course; that you are intelligent, that you are motivated, that you are interested in working with children and that you know something about teaching already. Your sessions with these tutors will obviously go better for you if you can interact with them at a higher level of understanding and early reading will help to achieve this. Getting off to a great start is obviously what you will want.

Something that many students (and researchers) find useful is a reading journal. You can start this with your pre-course reading; as well as making notes on the things you have read, write short summaries of the key points discussed in each article/chapter and provide a précis of the main arguments. If you do this properly, you should find this invaluable both in your growing understanding of teaching, but also when it comes to writing the assignments on your course.

However, there are also other sorts of research you can engage in. If you didn't already do this for your interview, find out as much as you can about your University and your course. Obviously you can visit the University's website to do this, but there are other places you can gather information from. For some fairly helpful statistical information you could visit www.unistats.com which compares different Universities. For more detailed commentary you could take a look at the recent Ofsted reports for your University's primary education courses (like schools, these are inspected).

Perhaps best of all, try to get some insider perspectives from students already on the course or from those who have already done it, or from those, like you, about to start. There are loads of places on the web you can do this, ranging from independent social network sites, to the University's own social

networks (often called ‘nings’) to internet forums hosted by respected organisations, like the TES (Times Educational Supplement). As well as making friends with other people who are about to start the course, you’re also likely to obtain some useful information from some of your University’s alumni. Be warned though; remember that the informality of social networking has very little in common with professional networking – for example some students and teachers have got into some serious trouble for being unprofessional about schools on social network sites. Also, do approach the comments of some students with a degree of caution as the forums occasionally attract the disgruntled minority who may not tell you the full story behind any dissatisfaction!

Another area of research you should consider engaging in is improving your subject knowledge. It’s likely to have been some time since you studied many of the subjects taken in primary schools, so a good place to start is to get the latest copy of the national curriculum and take a look to see what is covered. Undertake a needs analysis exercise to identify where you think you may have weaknesses and get on with correcting them.

In order to obtain QTS you must also pass three skills tests in Maths, English and ICT. Many on-line or high street bookshops sell guides to passing these and will help you to analyse your strengths and weaknesses in these areas. Furthermore, the TDA website www.tda.gov.uk has practice tests you can take that will give you even more idea of what is involved.



key points

Like all good scouts, be prepared

- Look at the book list your University has sent you, undertake some suggested reading and start a reading journal.
- Read about your University from official and unofficial sources.
- Brush up on your subject knowledge, after analysing which areas need addressing.

Get Ready

If you were thinking that the months before the course were going to be the calm before the storm, you weren’t entirely accurate. It’s true that the expectations are fairly gentle, but at the same time, if you want to make the

absolute most of the PGCE, you will aim to get a head start through some effective preparation.

I obviously haven't mentioned some fairly important practical information that you will need to engage in before you start, such as sorting out your accommodation, your money (e.g. fees, loans, etc) and filling in the copious amounts of paperwork that Universities require from you (health declarations, Criminal Record Bureau checks, etc). However, this is basically administrative leg work that has to be done. This chapter has focused on aiming to prepare you mentally for the course, and for your life in teaching. Clearly the more you can learn about teaching and your own personal attitudes and beliefs towards it, the better. The PGCE is possibly going to be one of the most, if not the most, intensive period of work and study in your life to date, so anything you can do in advance to help prepare you for this makes sense.

What are you waiting for? Go and get ready!



further reading

Arthur, J., Grainger, T., Wray, D., (eds) (2006) *Learning to Teach in the Primary School*: Abingdon, Routledge. This is a good 'catch-all' introduction to primary school teaching, written by people with huge amounts of experience of teacher-training courses. It's easy to read, and a good place to start for those with little experience.

Claxton, G. (2009) *What's the Point of School?: Rediscovering the Heart of Education*. London, Oneworld. A thought-provoking look at modern schools. This won't necessarily teach you a great deal about 'the basics' but with any luck it will make you think about whether modern schools work and about your part in them.

Palmer, J (ed) (2001), *Fifty Modern Thinkers on Education: From Piaget to the Present Day* London, Routledge. This is a very handy beginner's guide to some key educational theorists, their philosophies and their influence. Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner are ones that many Universities start with, so read those and then move on to some that catch your eye.

Pollard, A (2008) Chapter 2, 'Learning through mentoring in Initial Teacher Education' in *Reflective Teaching*: London, Continuum. This is very similar to the Arthur, Grainger, Wray book, in that it covers all the common areas that PGCEs examine. However, it is written in a slightly more 'academic' style.

3

Making the most of your time in school: Preparation and Organisation

Helen Taylor



chapter objectives

This chapter:

- will help you make the most of the time before the placement begins;
- will help you make the most of preliminary visit days to your placement setting;
- will help you plan your time effectively during the placement period.

Clearly during your PGCE you will want and need to make the most of your time in schools and other placements. Your placement will inevitably be very busy, so efficient planning and preparation are essential for making best use of the time and for preventing you from becoming exhausted.

Most of your PGCE placement time is likely to be spent in a school although you may have the opportunity to undertake some of your time in another setting. These may include nurseries and other settings where learning takes place, such as museums and galleries, zoos, nature reserves and historic buildings. Although the word 'school' is used in this chapter many of the points are also relevant in other settings.

Before you visit your placement setting

As soon as you discover where you are going to undertake your placement there is helpful information you can find out. First of all, find out as much as you can about the school; a good way to do this is to search the school's website and familiarise yourself with the useful content. This will give you factual information about the school including contact details and some idea of the ethos. Make a note of important information like the phone number, address and head teacher's name for future reference. Another helpful website to visit is the relevant inspection agency, e.g. Ofsted. You should be able to find the school's latest inspection report; this will give you further insight into the school and its areas of strength and areas for development.

On a practical note, find out about the location of your school and travel arrangements. Websites can be invaluable here. Remember to leave extra time for travelling through traffic during peak periods. On your first day it is advisable to arrive at school about 8.30am. This should be before the children start lessons for the day, but not so long before the children arrive that school staff do not know what to do with you. After this you are likely to need to arrive earlier, as you will have lessons and resources to prepare and organise before the school day begins. You will need to allow time to talk to teachers as appropriate. Allow for time in the morning queue for the photocopier too!

Many PGCE providers ask you to email or telephone the school before your first visit. Keep your message brief and include:

- a short introduction to yourself, including prior experience in schools and learning settings;
- additional strengths you bring to the school, such as sports coaching qualifications, musical instruments you play or particular computer skills;
- ask a few relevant questions, such as what time you should arrive on your first day, what are the lunch arrangements and, if you intend to drive to school, whether you can park in the school car park;
- say how much you are looking forward to your placement at their school.

The style of your message should be friendly but formal. With email use capital letters and formal spelling and grammar. You want to make a good first impression. Do not ask too many questions – only those that cannot wait until you actually visit.

There are general points that you will need to know in order to feel comfortable and accepted in your placement setting. Some of these may sound quite trivial but if overlooked, can cause embarrassment later. There are still teachers who always sit on the same chair in the staffroom and can be upset if you sit there inadvertently! In some schools teachers have their own mugs,

others are reserved for visitors. Staff members who pay for their drinks do not like to feel they are subsidising visitors, so ask how and who you pay. Also, find out:

1. Where you can hang your coat and put your bag, teaching resources and placement file in the classroom?
2. If it is okay for you to use the staffroom and the equipment in it at any time?
3. What the arrangements for lunch are?

Health and safety are important concerns in any placement setting. You should be aware of key policies and procedures. Hopefully you will never have to use them, but you certainly need to be prepared.

1. What are the fire evacuation procedures from the classroom and any other room I may be in with the children? (Don't forget there will be fire notices in each room of the school and you should familiarise yourself with these).
2. Where is the First Aid kept and who is a qualified First Aider? What are the procedures to follow for minor cuts and bruises?
3. Are there any children in your class with chronic illnesses, allergies or disabilities? If children need medication like asthma inhalers, epi-pens, where is it kept and what are the procedures for this?
4. What are the procedures for children wetting themselves and where are the spare clothes kept?
5. Where can a dustpan and brush or mop be found to clear up spills?
6. Who is the Designated Teacher for Child Protection? (You should have an awareness of the procedures to be followed for Child Protection before you start your placement, either from your PGCE provider or from your placement setting).

You will need to find out about the class you are going to be working with. This will include their names and ages (especially in a mixed class) and any organisational groupings. This will be especially important in a nursery setting where many of the children may be part-time and there may be different children in the afternoon to the morning. You will also need to know about children with additional needs and children who are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) so that you can adequately cater for their needs once you start teaching. Your class teacher and the Special Educational Needs co-ordinator (SENCO) will be able to help with this. You will be able to learn much about the children's needs and interests through observing them in class and in other situations around the school.

In this chapter, you are going to learn more about why we reflect as teachers, what theory and policy says about this process and what it can look like

Table 7.1

<i>Reflective Event</i>	<i>Focus</i>
Lesson evaluations	Individual lessons and their effectiveness, learning from practice to inform future teaching
Seminar or workshop discussions	Exploring the links between theory and practice, using stories and anecdotes from your own experience, to help you build up a 'bank' of theory related to your own practice or that you have observed
Professional or reflective journal, or blog	Considered reflection on your overall development as a teacher, or perhaps looking at a key educational issue or event during your PGCE. Designed to help you become more confident in your overall approach to teaching
Academic essays	Theory, research and practice in education – to help you develop the ability to ask critical questions about education, which can be applied to your own teaching

in practice. You will be able to see examples of students' reflections, evaluations and reflective writing, and consider what makes it reflective or how it could be improved. You will learn about a whole range of ways of reflecting, some of which will not necessarily be those that you are officially required to undertake during your PGCE, but which you may find useful. Finally, you can follow up some suggested readings on reflection and reflective practice.

Why do we reflect as teachers?

It's natural...

In many ways, you could say that reflecting is an inevitable part of any learning process. If you are learning to drive, to cook or to play an instrument, you need to think about what is going right and what is going wrong and why that is. If you find you are persistently unable to 'get it' or to improve, the reflecting or questioning will continue and grow.

'Twas ever thus...

We will look later at in more detail at the theory of reflection and reflective practice. For now, it is interesting again to note that the idea of reflection and reflective practice is not a new one. As early as 1933, John Dewey, writing about the process of learning and the role of reflection in that, talked of the necessary attitudes to be reflective. These included 'open-mindedness',

‘wholeheartedness’ (discussed in terms of enthusiasm) and ‘responsibility’. Dewey was not writing about learning to teach, so much as the process of learning generally, but his work has been very influential in developing the idea and practice of reflecting in teaching.

What does it look like in practice?

In this final section of the chapter, there is the chance to look at actual examples of student teachers’ reflections. These examples show a range of types of reflection and give you the opportunity to consider how reflective they are, and if they could be improved. The first three are examples of public reflection – that is, reflection which is intended for a public audience, such as mentors, other student teachers or university tutors.

In terms of written reflections, the first point on the ‘continuum’ is probably the lesson evaluation.

Look at the example below:

Children’s Learning

- The children did really well in this lesson
- They listened carefully and worked hard
- Jo is always messing around in English, but he doesn’t in Maths
- Some children were not writing very neatly in their books, and did not tidy away properly at the end.

Teacher’s Learning

- I managed to stick to my plan and achieved the learning outcomes
- In the discussion at the beginning I think I managed to ask most of the children a question, and loads of them had their hands up.
- The poster activity was good and I have got some good work for my display
- I was pleased with the way I used my voice in the lesson. I managed to sound more enthusiastic I think

Implications for Future Planning

- Do more posters – they look really good on the wall display
- Remember to tell the children that they must write neatly
- Keep up the good work on timings!

These are two strong examples of reflection - both show evidence of strong thinking about thinking – or metacognition:

Ina – ‘I have noticed a significant change in the way I think’;

Millie – ‘I feel almost as though if I am aware of the structures of control that surround me and my profession, then I am somehow less constrained by them.’

Although the students are not reflecting directly on their teaching here, both are using lessons learned from their studies to carry forward to their teaching. Millie shows how her critical reflection on research and policy is informing her wider perspective on education and how this will affect her teaching. Ina applies the mistakes made in her oral presentation to the teaching situation and turns this into a target: ‘I suspect that I speak quite quickly, which I also want to remedy.’

Charlotte’s view point and response

I found writing a personal statement really challenging because it is difficult to know what the schools are looking for and how to make your statement stand out from the others that they will receive. I wanted to make sure that my statement was not too generic and reflected my personality and ethos, but at the same time I wanted to show that I would be able to fit in to a school community and be flexible depending upon what they were looking for. I was also unsure about how much I should sell myself (because I wanted to demonstrate that I am capable but not come across as arrogant or that I feel I have nothing to learn). I found the feedback very useful because it showed me which areas needed improvement or extension, and I think that having another person’s perspective (especially someone who runs a primary school) enables you to see it objectively instead of just subjectively. I am hoping that as I have made the suggested changes, I will have more chance of getting interviews in the schools I would like to work.

Appendix

Getting on a Primary PGCE

Hellen Ward

This section:

- will help you to think about which course is the right one for you, and provide some helpful strategies for ways to secure your place

The minimum requirements

To be a teacher you need a degree and qualified teacher status. One of the quick ways of finding which is the correct course for you is to look on the TDA website. As Graham Birrell stated in the opening chapter, there are many different types of teacher training course and clearly the one you take should be specific to the age group you wish to teach. The option that is right for you (e.g. full/part-time or flexible) will also depend on your circumstances. All courses cover the principles of teaching along with practical experience in the classroom.

In this time of public accountability there is the equivalence of league tables for ITT providers on TDA website. These tables include information about important factors such as, location, grading and number of courses. *There are 236 providers with 132 providers offering a traditional course and 35 offering flexible routes.* There are 27 institutions providing ITT that have been designated Grade A providers, which is the highest TDA category for quality and is based upon the latest Ofsted inspection information. This website also shows the required qualification for each institution and this information may help you target your application.

For a PGCE you will always need to have a first degree, and most institutions require this to be a minimum of a second class. Other basic requirements for you are GCSE passes at C or above in English, Mathematics and Science. If you have not got these, although some institutions will offer equivalence tests, it is still recommended that you gain these qualifications. Discuss this with the admissions office at the institution of your choice. Some institutions will look at other factors in addition to academic qualifications, so read any information you find, for example on their website or in their prospectus very carefully. Don't assume all providers ask for the same qualifications or experience.

All of the courses available have different delivery modes and are designed to suit different individual needs. Go to the websites of the institutions you are interested in and find out what is unique about the courses they are offering. Even at the same institution many different routes are likely to be offered. Many websites will also provide you with a personal email or telephone contact to enable you to find out more information. This is worth doing as you can then be sure a particular course meets your needs.

Another way to find out the right course for you is to use the Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR) website. To get on many courses you will need to apply to this organisation and you can find the most appropriate course by using their search engine. However if you wish to undertake a flexible or part-time route you will usually be able to apply directly to the institution concerned.

Experience

As Graham stated in Chapter 2, it is highly unlikely that you would be offered an interview unless you can demonstrate some previous experience in school. There are no hard rules about the amount or type of experience needed, but generally writing 'I spent a few days in a classroom and liked it' will not be sufficient. Some institutions require more than 30 days whilst others will expect a minimum of two weeks. You will have 20 lines on the GTTR application form to write about your school experience. Remember to add other experiences, for example, teaching sports, taking part in a play-scheme, being involved in a children's drama group, or running/supporting a young persons' uniformed organisation such as the brownies, cubs, guides or scouts. Ensure the experience is recent and relevant and don't just assume because you write, 'I hear children read at my local primary school' and think this is wonderful that this will be sufficient. What is important is, 'How often?' 'For how long did you participate?' 'What are the skills needed?' and 'How does this suggest you have an aptitude for teaching?'

Glossary

Advanced Skills Teacher (AST)	A teacher in a school in England who is assessed as having particular skills in a certain area. Part of that teacher's time is used in teaching a class and part in sharing skills with others.
Cross-curricular	Applying skills and knowledge from different disciplines to a single experience or theme
Foundation and Core Subjects	In the current National Curriculum in England the subjects are divided into core and foundation with the most often – taught called core subjects (including English and mathematics) and the others, foundation.
GTC	General Teaching Council – a body that leads and regulates the teaching profession, there is one for each country of the UK, so you will see the initials GTCE, GTCNI, GTCs and GTCW
GTTR	Graduate Teacher Training Registry – a body that co-ordinates some applications for ITE from graduates. For some PGCE courses you apply directly to the provider. There is also a GTTR for Scotland.
ICT/ ICT suite	Information Communications Technology – this includes working with computers. An ICT suite is a shared space in a school with computers enough computers for a whole class to use
Induction	Usually the first year spent as a teacher after qualification
ISA	Independent Safeguarding Authority – registers those who work with children

Useful websites

www.tda.gov.uk	This is the Training and Development Agency for schools. It has information particularly for those working in England. This includes the Professional Standards for Teachers.
http://www.gttr.ac.uk	This is Graduate Teacher Training Registry, through which you apply for most PGCEs.
www.gtce.org.uk www.gtcw.org.uk www.gtcs.org.uk www.gtcni.org.uk	These are the addresses of the GTC websites for the four countries of the UK; they provide help and guidance, particularly on Induction into the profession when you are qualified.
www.ofsted.gov.uk www.estyn.gov.uk	As well as school reports, Ofsted (England) and Estyn (Wales) publish reports on subjects and issues in education.
www.dcsf.gov.uk www.scotland.gov.uk www.deni.gov.uk http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills	Each of the four countries has a government website or a section of their website devoted to education.
www.ttrb.ac.uk	Access to the research and evidence base informing teacher education
www.tlrp.org	Teaching and Learning Research Programme – this organisation support research to promote effective teaching and learning in the UK.
www.teachernet.gov.uk	A useful source of support, including information that can be downloaded and publications that can be ordered

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