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NQ series



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It's rare to come across a new teacher who truly relishes the prospect of finding and applying for teaching posts. With careful preparation and planning, however, it is possible to make the process more of a challenge than an ordeal. This publication contains all the advice and information you'll need to make applying for teaching jobs as straightforward as possible. You can also get lots of tips and advice from our website, **www.new2teaching.org.uk**.

Student members of ATL can also access our job finder service at **www.new2teaching.org.uk**, which gives you access to hundreds of teaching jobs via online search tools and lots of advice on applying for your first job.

Good luck!

Contents

Looking for vacancies

The schools sector	6
Sixth form colleges/the FE sector	8
Supply work	9
Where to look for vacancies	10
What to look for in a vacancy	12



Written applications

Requesting application details	13
Before completing the application form	14
Completing the application form	15
The applicant profile or person specification	16
Completing the supporting statement	17
The importance of your unique selling points	18
Writing a covering letter	18
Applying by letter and CV	19
A basic CV formula	20
Applying to a pool	22
Making speculative applications	24
Choosing your referees	25
Preparing your portfolio	26

Interviews

Preparing for interviews	28
Having second thoughts	29
On the interview day – a few tips	32
Possible interview scenarios	33
Establishing rapport and body language	34
What interviewers are looking for	35
Questions you may be asked	36
Answering questions	37
Being asked to demonstrate skills	38
Questions you may like to ask	39
Pitfalls to avoid	40
Equal opportunities: your rights	41

After the interview

Accepting the post	42
If you are not successful	42
Making complaints	44
Self-appraisal and evaluation	44
Looking to the future	45

How ATL can help

46

Looking for vacancies

Induction is probably the most important factor you will need to consider before you decide which posts to apply for.



The schools sector

If you intend to teach in England, you will probably want to make sure that you can complete or begin an induction period. If you don't successfully complete an induction period, you won't be able to teach in maintained schools or non-maintained special schools.

The induction period is one year for full-time teachers (pro-rata for part-time teachers), but periods of one term or more can count towards induction. So, if possible, you should be looking for a permanent or a temporary post in which you can complete at least part, if not all, of your induction.

Make sure if you do go for a temporary job that the headteacher will agree that you can begin induction in that post.

Some independent schools participate in the induction programme but not all, as it is not compulsory for them. If you do start your career in an independent school that does not offer an induction period, you will have to complete the induction period if you later decide that you want to teach in a maintained school or a non-maintained special school. Therefore, if completing induction at the beginning of your teaching career matters to you, you should make sure that the independent school you apply to will let you complete induction.

There is also statutory induction followed by two years of early professional development for all newly qualified teachers in Wales. There are distinctive Welsh standards for induction and one significant difference between the arrangements for England and those for Wales is that there is no opportunity to retake induction in England if you fail, whereas in Wales there is.

Please note that induction arrangements in England are currently under review, with new arrangements expected to come into force by September 2012, following a government consultation in 2011, along with revised teachers' standards.

There are different arrangements for the induction stage in Northern Ireland. Teachers who complete this stage in Northern Ireland are exempt from the Induction Regulations if they later teach in English schools.

For further guidance on induction or applying for teaching posts in Northern Ireland or Wales, contact ATL at the following:

Northern Ireland – Unit C2, 16 West Bank Drive,
Belfast, BT3 9LA

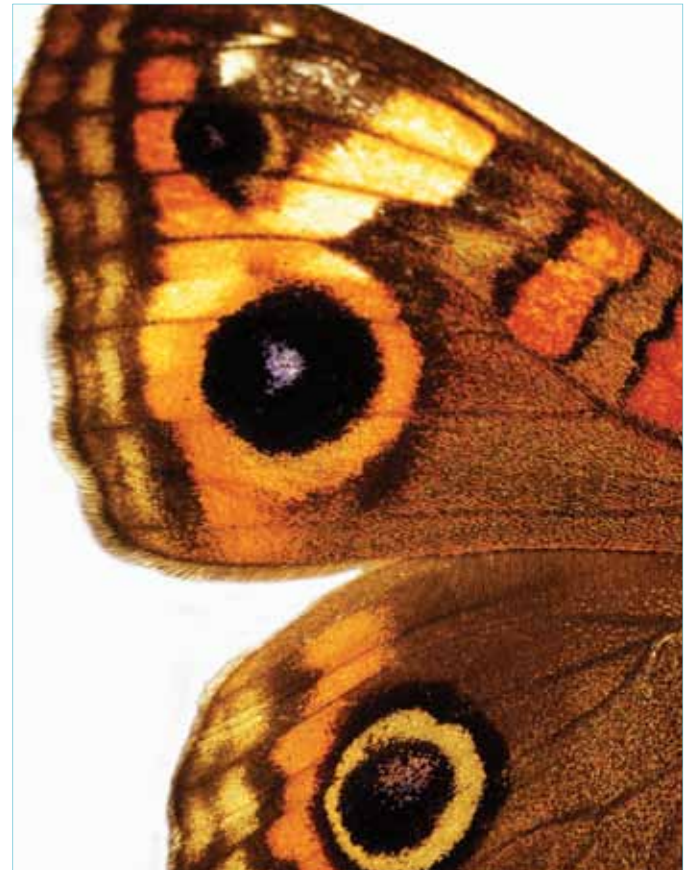
Tel: **028 9078 2020** Fax: **028 9078 2029**

Email: ni@atl.org.uk

Wales – 1st Floor, 64B Newport Road,
Cardiff, CF24 0DF

Tel: **029 2046 5000** Fax: **029 2046 2000**

Email: cymru@atl.org.uk





Sixth form colleges/the FE sector

If you want to begin your teaching career in a sixth form college or FE college, be aware that they do participate in the induction programme but only on a voluntary basis.

This means that if you wanted to move to the schools sector afterwards but your sixth form college or FE college did not offer you the opportunity to complete your induction period, you would have to complete it later on.

Supply work

If you want to work as a supply teacher, only posts of at least one term in duration can be counted towards your induction. If you don't begin your induction within 16 months of first taking up your initial supply post after gaining Qualified Teacher Status, you won't be able to take up non-inductable supply posts (ie those of less than a term).

Local authorities (LAs) do have the power to extend your entitlement to short-term supply work in exceptional circumstances, which prevent you from securing an inductable post. This is decided on a case-by-case basis. LAs have discretion to extend the period of short-term supply work by up to a maximum of 12 months. Reasons for such an extension might include:

- a shortage of relevant posts in your area
- personal circumstances meaning that you cannot move to where more vacancies may be
- serious illness.

If you find yourself in the position of needing the 16-month limit to be extended, you should contact the induction coordinator at your LA.

If you are looking for supply work, contact the LAs nearest you to see if they are operating a supply pool system. If you decide to seek work through a supply agency and are unsure about your terms of employment, as a member ATL can advise you (see page 46 for contact details).



Where to look for vacancies

Once you have taken the induction requirements into consideration, you can begin your search for actual vacancies. If you are coming to the end of your training, your course tutors may have information on local vacancies or personal contacts that may be helpful to you.

There is often more variety and choice in the weeks following the three deadlines for resignations from teaching posts – commonly 31 October, 28 February and 31 May.

The following avenues may be useful in looking for vacancies:

LAs: LA job bulletins often carry details of vacancies before they reach the national press. Contact the appropriate education personnel office to arrange for these bulletins to be sent to you. Relevant contact details, as well as information about recruitment processes and any pools, can usually be found on each LA's website. Some school websites may also list vacancies.



The press: The *Times Educational Supplement* has pages of advertisements for vacancies every Friday and online at www.tes.co.uk. Other broadsheets covering education and vacancies are:

- *The Guardian*
- *The Daily Telegraph*
- *The Independent*
- *The Times*
- *The Sunday Times*
- *The Sunday Telegraph*.

If you're looking for a post in a denominational school, look out for:

- *The Church Times* (Church of England)
- *The Universe* (Roman Catholic)
- *The Jewish Chronicle*
- *The Daily Jang* (a leading Asian paper).

The local or regional press in the specific areas you are interested in may carry advertisements for teaching posts. They are worth checking, as only vacancies for headteachers and deputies have to be advertised nationally.

Contacts: The contacts you make while on school placement or while doing supply work can lead to employment. Never underestimate the value of networking.

ATL also offers a job finder service for new teachers. To access hundreds of teaching jobs, and for advice on job seeking, see the 'job finder service' page in the 'job hunting' section of www.new2teaching.org.uk.



What to look for in a vacancy

As a newly qualified teacher facing an induction period, be sure to look out for vacancies advertised as being on the main pay scale (often written as ‘main scale’) or those that refer specifically to newly qualified teachers – in other words, vacancies that carry no extra responsibility points. For details of the pay scales for newly qualified teachers, see www.new2teaching.org.uk.

If you're returning to the profession, look for vacancies that will support your return, even if this means a temporary backward step – eg if you were a head of department you might want to consider a post without management responsibilities. It's far better to settle back into the profession at a comfortable pace than be forced to hit the ground running at a speed faster than you have achieved in the past.

Independent schools, academies and free schools are free to set their own pay and conditions, so it's important to check the terms and conditions when considering a job in these schools.



Written applications

Making a good written application can take some time so try not to leave it until the night before the deadline.

Requesting application details

Contacting the school to request application details is the first opportunity you have to market yourself and to make a lasting (and positive!) impression.

Much of the following may seem obvious, but it is important. So remember:

- either telephone, fax, email or write to request an application form
- keep your communication brief, include a date as well as mentioning where you saw the advertisement, and pay attention to details such as the spelling of names

- if you choose to write, opt for good quality paper with an appropriately sized envelope
- make sure you include full details of how you may be contacted.

Bear in mind that, should you be called for interview, it is possible that everything you have sent to the school or LA will be available to the interviewers and will therefore contribute to the overall impression you make.





Before completing the application form

Before you begin to complete the application form, try to ensure that you have at least the following information:

- the exact title of the post (eg class teacher, history teacher, etc)
- the salary range
- details of who the post is responsible to
- a detailed job description including a full list of responsibilities
- information on extra duties that may be expected of the successful applicant
- an indication of the expected timetable (for secondary schools)
- a detailed applicant profile, sometimes called a 'person specification'.

Go through this information carefully and ask yourself whether you would want to accept the post if you were offered it.

Questions to consider include:

- Would it allow you to live where you would like to be?
- Would it allow you to teach in the type of school you are looking for?
- Would it allow you to teach the subjects and age range for which you have been trained?
- Would it allow you to complete an induction period successfully?

Completing the application form

Most schools and local authorities (LAs) ask applicants to complete application forms rather than apply by CV and covering letter. Spending time on the application form, and carefully planning what you intend to include, will pay off.

- Carefully follow any guidance you are given, especially if you are applying to more than one school at a time.
 - Check if the application form is available online. Completing an electronic version of the form can often save a lot of time since it is so much easier to rectify mistakes.
 - If you have to complete a paper version of the application form, take a photocopy and complete the photocopy first. Write clearly in black ink. The forms will be copied for each member of the interview panel, so make sure yours is legible.
 - Make sure you have a copy of your completed form in case you are called for interview. You will need to refresh your memory about the information you have given.
 - Do not submit your CV unless you are specifically asked to do so.
- Always use an A4 envelope for your application to avoid folding it and, where possible, deliver it in person. If you have to send it through the post, include a stamped addressed envelope or postcard that can be returned to you as an acknowledgement that the school has received your application.
 - Always keep to closing dates. If you want to apply but will miss the closing date, you could try contacting the school to find out if late applications will be accepted.

Your real opportunity to stand out from the other candidates is in the section called 'relevant experience and other information' or 'supporting statement'.

In order to complete this section with relevance to the post, you must read the applicant profile.



The applicant profile or person specification

The applicant profile/person specification describes the technical and personal skills, qualifications, knowledge and experience required of the postholder.

It is essential to read the applicant profile in detail so that you can match your application with what the employers are actually looking for.

If you can't comfortably fit the applicant profile, you should think carefully about whether you want to apply for the job, as it is most likely that the profile will form the basis of the assessment criteria, both at the shortlisting stage and during the interview. Points will usually be listed as either essential or desirable – you need to have all the essential ones, and as many of the desirable ones as possible.



Completing the supporting statement

- Write a list of your unique selling points as they relate to the applicant profile and job description.
- It may be worth highlighting, either by headings or in bold text, where you are referring in your statement to the key qualities asked for in the job description or specification. This makes it easy for the assessors to see the extent to which you meet the criteria.
- Draft your statement first, making sure you begin and end with impact.
- Aim to convey a sense of your personality.
- Explain what attracted you to the job.
- Fill the main body of the statement with your skills, experience and achievements, including information on hobbies, travel and voluntary work, always relating them to the applicant profile and job description.
- Optimise the positive, but stay within the realms of reality! You may be asked to substantiate what you have written.
- If possible, ask someone to check through your statement. They may spot errors or suggest improvements.
- Firmly attach any supplementary sheets you need to include so that they don't get lost. That said, brevity is usually the key here and, if you aim for each sentence to convey a new point, you'll avoid aimless paragraphs and the need for extra sheets.



It is essential that you write a new supporting statement for each application you make. If you don't, your statement cannot directly relate to the applicant profile and job description. Also, make sure that you don't just borrow phrases from the job description. Use your own words, not the ones provided by the school.

The importance of your unique selling points

A sorrowful cry from new teachers seeking work in areas of strong competition is that they have little chance of success when so many other teachers are going for the same jobs.

If you find yourself feeling like this, think about your unique selling points and how they can help you to secure the post you want. What skills do you have that others don't? Always be positive about how ideal you are for the job.



Writing a covering letter

If your supporting statement has been well written, there will be no need to include any information in the covering letter other than the points listed below. Avoid being ingratiating, and remember that brevity is vital!

- Application forms usually have to be sent to the headteacher. Make sure you address this person as they address themselves on the school letterhead.
- State your thanks for the application form.
- State what you have included in your application, ie 'Please find enclosed my completed application form for the post of... and a stamped addressed postcard for acknowledgement of receipt'.
- End with the expectation of a reply, followed by 'Yours sincerely'. Print your name as well as signing it, if there could be any doubt as to who is sending the letter.
- Make sure your letter is headed with your full address, contact telephone number(s) and email address (if you have one).



Applying by letter and CV

Occasionally, candidates are asked to apply for a post by letter and CV, particularly in the independent sector. It is a good idea to have an up-to-date CV ready anyway so that, if you are asked to submit one, you don't have to rush to prepare it. A basic CV formula is given on page 20.

Applying by letter and CV means that your covering letter has to be far more detailed than it would be if accompanying an application form. Most importantly, your letter must include a detailed supporting statement (see page 17) that relates directly to the applicant profile and job description.

Be sure to mention in the letter that your CV is enclosed, in case it becomes separated from the letter.

A basic CV formula

Always type your CV and print it on no more than two sheets of good quality paper. Avoid printing on both sides and make sure that the second page is numbered and carries a header (in smaller print) with your full name.

There are several CV-writing programmes available, and there are often advertisements for CV-writing services in the press. However the safest option, usually, is to produce your own CV that is tailored to the teaching profession. Make sure there are no gaps in your CV, as these will be spotted easily. If questioned about periods of unemployment or illness, simply explain how positive the experience was in terms of what you learned from adversity.





A CV should contain the following information:

- your name, address, telephone number and, if you have them, fax number, mobile number and email address
- your education and qualifications, starting usually with A-levels – include brief summaries (one or two sentences) of your degree course(s) and teaching qualification
- your employment history or work experience including your key responsibilities in any relevant jobs; if you are returning to the profession and have an Ofsted (Estyn for Wales or HMIE in Scotland) report pertaining to your work from your previous school, you could include any relevant quotations here as well as details of any continuing professional development courses you have taken
- any positions of responsibility you have held outside employment (for example, leading youth groups or being a society president at college or university)
- your other qualifications and skills, for example, musical instrument grades, any driving licences you hold, etc
- your hobbies (be honest!)
- a skills summary – this should be no more than two to three sentences outlining positive aspects such as motivation, determination, drive, commitment, ability to work to deadlines and to work effectively with colleagues
- referee details (see page 25).

Some people also include their date of birth.

Use your CV-writing time as an opportunity to get to know yourself. Be conscious of your experiences and clarify in your mind what each one has taught you. Doubtless, you'll be pleasantly surprised at the breadth of skills you have accumulated!

Applying to a pool

Some LAs run a 'pool' service whereby first-time applicants (usually for primary posts) apply to the pool rather than individual schools.

There will be a specific application form to complete, which is designed to elicit information about your education, training, experiences, skills and achievements as well as preferences for the area in which you would like to teach, type of school and age group.

After being accepted into the pool, those who are allocating posts to applicants will endeavour to match preferences with needs. You are not obliged to accept the offer of a post as a result of a pool application, although your reasons for refusal should be well thought through.





Points to remember when applying to a pool

- Applying to a pool is confirmation of your desire to work in a particular LA. Use this desire in your application by including details of why you want to work there – show off your knowledge of the area!
- Individual LAs have their own deadlines for the completion of pool applications. Don't miss this deadline as late applications can cause administrative nightmares!
- Interviews for pools usually take place over two or three days. Your slot will be about 20 minutes, during which you will be asked a variety of questions and be given an opportunity to discuss your portfolio (see page 26). Likely questions include:
 - what is it about working in a school in this LA that you look forward to?
 - what are your thoughts on how good behaviour might be promoted?
- describe your experiences of recent curriculum developments
- how would you take action to deal with underachievement?
- tell us about a lesson you have taught in which children were given the opportunity to develop skills
- how does assessment promote further learning?
- how would you develop good relationships with parents?
- The panel on pool interviews usually consists of one or two local headteachers as well as LA staff (advisors/inspectors or human resource staff).

Making speculative applications

It is not always necessary to wait for a post to be advertised before making an application. Speculative approaches can be successful if they happen to arrive at just the right time. When making a speculative application to a particular school, remember the following:

- plan your letter to include your skills and achievements and begin by stating what kind of vacancy you would be interested in
- go for brevity rather than volume, and don't repeat any of the information in your CV
- write or type on good quality paper
- match your skills and experience to what you know about the school
- include details of attributes you could bring to the school
- ask for an interview and offer suggestions about your availability
- include a stamped, addressed envelope and end your letter with the expectation of a response, ie 'I look forward to hearing from you'
- make a follow-up call if you don't hear within a week.



Choosing your referees

Think carefully about your choice of referees. People you choose must be appropriate to teaching, and your contact must be recent. If you can only muster up a teacher from your distant past, you'll immediately raise the suspicions of your prospective employers!

Your referees must also be in a position to match your qualities to the job in question, so you'd be wise to provide them with copies of the job description and applicant profile as well as your application before they write their statements.

Good choices of referee would be your tutor from your initial teacher training institution or, if you are a prospective returnee, your most recent headteacher.

If you're applying to a denominational school, it would be wise to include a member of the appropriate clergy. You must gain each potential referee's permission before including his or her details on an application form.



Preparing your portfolio

Portfolios are an essential method of demonstrating past work, skills and excellence in your professional life. For job seekers, they are important accessories to applications, especially in the primary and special needs sectors.

There's no doubt that collecting together the best examples of your work gives a real boost to confidence levels. By highlighting your successes, you offer interviewers an extremely positive focus for questioning – as well as allowing your skills to speak for themselves!

The type of folder to use

The ideal size for your portfolio folder is A3, so that it's big enough to hold relatively large examples of pupils' work as well as other documents relating to planning. Make sure it looks presentable and is well labelled. Most good stationers and art suppliers stock selections of portfolio folders.

Choose a folder without inner plastic pockets for ease of retrieval during the interview. The last thing you want is to be fumbling with stubborn pockets which are reluctant to relinquish their contents. Place the contents of your folder in the order you want to retrieve each item.





What to include in your portfolio

The following items could be included in your portfolio:

- a sample of your planning, both medium term and short term
- an example of your assessment of pupils' work
- photographs of displays, special events such as class outings you have been involved in, or visiting speakers
- samples of pupils' work (particularly work that reflects the standards you value or your philosophy of teaching)
- samples of your work and pupils' work that indicate your understanding of current education issues.

Unless you're applying for a job very early into your training, you'll have material you can include in a portfolio, but be selective. Although it's advisable to include items that reflect your excellence, it can also be positive to include something that demonstrates your ability to learn from your experiences, especially if you're a newly qualified teacher. Many interviews include questions on how well candidates have bounced back from classroom 'disasters', which reveal your skills as a reflective practitioner.

When preparing for an interview, take anything out of your portfolio that isn't pertinent to the job specification, so that you'll be able to make use of everything.

Interviews

Once you've sent off your application, it'll go through the first selection stage. A shortlist will then be drawn up of candidates to be invited for interview. If you are shortlisted for an interview, be sure to send a written reply confirming the arrangements. Don't attempt to change the date suggested by the school unless it is absolutely necessary.



Preparing for interviews

Regardless of how irrational or unfair this seems, instant judgements based on your appearance will be made about you at the interview, so what you wear is vitally important. The fact that there are as many dress codes as there are schools doesn't make your decision about what to wear any easier, but these ideas may help.



- Make sure that whatever you wear is not so out of character that you feel uncomfortable.
- Try to find out the dress code for your school. If you can't do this through local knowledge, there's nothing wrong with telephoning to ask what the dress code is. In some schools, arriving in a suit wouldn't be at all appropriate, yet in many others it would be expected.
- Whatever you decide to wear, go for darker, coordinated colours and avoid anything too baggy, striped or patterned. Keep accessories to a minimum.
- Don't forget the finer details such as hair and nails. If your hair needs constant adjustment, you'll infuriate your interviewers and your nails will be on show each time you shake hands or show items from your portfolio.

It isn't just clothes that create an impression. It's worth remembering that alcohol on the breath is easily detected and that smoke clings to fabric for hours, so refrain from smoking or drinking well before your interview, if possible. Plenty of sleep before the big day will naturally do wonders for your appearance and ability to think clearly.

Gathering information

When you've been given notice of an interview, you'll need to gather information on the school (or LA if it is a pool interview) and the profession in general so that you're fully prepared.

The school

If you're offered the opportunity to visit the school before the interview, take it.

This'll give you the chance to get a feel for the place, meet staff and observe pupils, and will greatly ease the pressures of the interview day. Use the time wisely and never forget that you'll be under close scrutiny! However, do not canvass (solicit support for your application), as this will disqualify you immediately.

If you're not invited to visit, aim to find out before the interview as much as you can about the size and locality of the school, its catchment area and the strengths of the school (academic, sporting, musical, dramatic, etc). The following sources may be useful:

- the internet – many schools now have their own websites, which can provide valuable information for candidates
- the material sent to you by the school

- the LA
- the newspaper local to the school
- the library local to the school
- the school's latest inspection report (usually available online via web addresses given on page 31).





The profession in general

You'll almost certainly be asked questions on current issues in education and there are several places to gather information to ensure you are as up to date as possible.

- ATL provides news, views and analysis of what's really going on in education. Members should refer to copies of *Report* magazine, which features articles on current education issues. You can see an online version of *Report* at www.atl.org.uk/report. We also publish a range of publications (free to members) – for a copy of the publications catalogue call ATL despatch on **0845 4500 009** or see www.atl.org.uk/publications. Finally, access all the latest news, as well as lots of advice, on ATL's website especially for students and NQs at www.new2teaching.org.uk.
- Talk to your tutors if you are at college.
- Other websites worth a look include:
 - the Department for Education (DfE) at www.education.gov.uk
 - Ofsted at www.ofsted.gov.uk, www.estyn.gov.uk or Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland at www.hmie.gov.uk
 - the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) at www.tda.gov.uk – please note that from April 2012 the functions of the TDA are due to be taken over by the DfE and the Teaching Agency, a new executive agency responsible for ensuring the support of high quality teachers and training and for teacher regulation, subject to it receiving the necessary approvals
 - the educational press and associated websites.

Planning your journey

You'll probably be sent a map and relevant travel information when you accept the invitation to interview. Make sure you plan your journey in detail. A trial run, if at all possible, will make sure you know exactly how much time you need to allow. Aim to arrive early so that any delays you encounter won't matter and you have time to gather your thoughts when you arrive. You may be able to claim travel expenses for the interview – check with the school whether this is the case.

Having second thoughts

If, at any stage of the application process, you have second thoughts and decide not to continue, you are entitled to withdraw.

Before the interview day, either write (if there is time) or telephone to explain your decision. If you begin to feel this way during the interview day, ask the headteacher or person in charge of the interviews for a quiet word at a convenient moment. Your feelings should be respected.



Don't simply fail to turn up. Although you may not be entitled to claim any expenses if you drop out before the day's conclusion, there's no failure in wanting to withdraw from the proceedings. It is far better that you are happy and still job searching than in a job or school that is wrong for you, particularly if you're a newly qualified teacher who's facing an induction period.



On the interview day – a few tips

It's easy to allow anxiety to take over on important occasions such as interviews, but this can be controlled with a little physical and mental preparation.

- Pay attention to your diet on the day. You don't want to be hungry, and an empty stomach can affect concentration. Fill up with fruits, vegetables and carbohydrates that will help you to maintain balanced blood sugar levels. Avoid fatty, sugary foods that encourage soaring highs and crashing lows.
- Develop good breathing habits. Slow, deep breaths can be instantly calming.
- Negative thinking can take over if unchecked. Be confident and enjoy the day. It's your chance to express your talents and achievements, so allow yourself to shine.
- If you suspect nerves will be a problem, try some affirmations before the big day. Repeating a positive phrase such as 'I am calm and relaxed' has been shown to reduce anxiety.
- Don't forget to pack a notepad and pen as well as any documents relating to the interview and position.

Possible interview scenarios

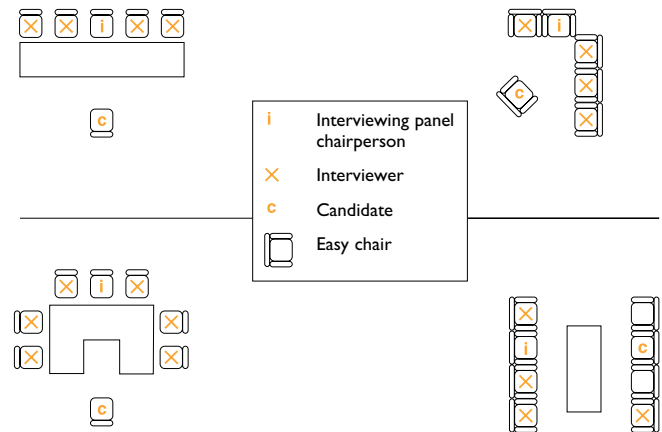
The actual interview day can take many forms but, most commonly, you can expect to meet key personnel such as the headteacher and his or her deputies, and others with whom you would have to work closely. You will probably go on a tour of the school, and there may be food or drink available, followed by an interview.

The interview panel is often comprised of the headteacher, the deputy head and the head of department (in secondary schools), as well as a member of the governing body and possibly an LA official. Each member of the panel should be introduced to you before the interview begins and their positions should be made clear.

It is not unusual for all candidates to be together at the start of the interviews and to be called in at approximately 20-30 minute intervals. Unless you are called in first, use the time to relax and gather your thoughts. It's common practice for the chairperson of the interview panel to bring in and introduce the candidate.

Common layouts of interview rooms

Be prepared for a variety of seating arrangements during the actual interview, as schools will have their own preferences.



Establishing rapport and body language

A successful interviewee is often an expert at establishing a good rapport with strangers in potentially stressful situations. This isn't simply achieved through speech but through non-verbal communications, too.

- Use a firm grip when shaking hands with your interviewers, make eye contact and smile.
- Be aware of your posture while walking and sitting. Leaning forward slightly gives the appearance of interest and limited hand and arm movements convey serenity – despite what may be happening on the inside!
- Think about the way you sound, the pace of your speech and tone of voice. The panel will be picturing you teaching pupils they know, and will need to feel at ease with your confidence.
- Avoid fidgeting and fiddling. Aim to develop a conscious awareness of how you may appear to others before the interview. Ask friends to tell you if you have any subconscious habits that could be tamed!
- It is common to mirror, subconsciously, what an interviewer does – for example, crossing arms or legs when they do. Aim to maintain an 'open' posture (ie nothing crossed) regardless of what is going on in front of you.



What interviewers are looking for

In addition to what is listed on the person specification, the interviewers will also be looking to see if you will:

- fit in with existing staff
- be able to make a valuable contribution to the school
- be sympathetic with the way the school is managed
- be able to develop your personal philosophies of teaching in the school.



Questions you may be asked



During the interview, expect to be asked questions by each member of the panel. They'll have a list of questions that they'll ask every candidate, although the supplementary questions that will arise from your answers may vary.

The first questions are usually designed to put you at ease and may feel like small talk. Just participate as naturally as possible but don't let your first answer go on too long!

Typical opening questions could include some or all of the following.

- Did you have a safe journey?
- What did you find interesting about the school during your tour?
- What attracts you to teaching?
- What attracts you to this post?

Other questions that follow will focus more specifically on professional issues and the specific needs of the post.

- What do you see as being the current issues in your subject area(s)?
- What do you know about the foundation stage/recent curriculum developments/citizenship issues?

- How would you introduce a topic to your class?
- How would you deal with an awkward pupil or parent?
- How do you encourage achievement?
- How do you stimulate enthusiasm?
- What are your views on inclusion?
- How do you ensure pupils do homework?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?
- What issues in education interest you?
- What aspects of this job do you consider to be most important?
- What do others consider to be your strengths?
- What motivates you?
- What have you done that shows initiative?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years' time?

Answering questions

There are two basic rules to follow when answering interview questions:

- listen to what is being asked (obvious, maybe, but it's common for candidates to answer a question that hasn't been asked)
- don't start to answer a question before you know how you will end your response.

If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification rather than bluffing. Likewise, if you lose your thread, own up sooner rather than later. You'll be admired for your honesty!

Interviewers may play 'devil's advocate' by throwing in deliberately controversial comments. You'll be assessed on your responses, so aim for balance while giving your honest opinion. This way, you avoid the possibility of contradicting yourself.

You may well be asked different types of questions – for example, closed questions requiring short, factual answers (*'How long have you lived in this city?'*) and open questions that give you the opportunity to expand on the basic facts (*'How have you ensured equality of opportunity in your lessons?'*).

Make sure you realise when you are being asked a closed question, so that you don't ramble – sometimes, just a short answer will suffice.

If you find that your interviewers are doing as much talking as you are, don't be alarmed. Research has shown that the more an interviewer talks, the more impressed they are with the candidate.



Being asked to demonstrate skills

Many interviews now include a practical session. This usually involves having to teach a small group of hand-picked pupils for about 20 minutes.

Accepted good practice is to give candidates notice of a practical session, including the topic to be covered and its duration. If you're given prior notice, you owe it to yourself to prepare thoroughly, and you may want to ask the advice of your tutors if you're still in training.

Although a practical session can be daunting, it's best to view it as a challenge.

If it is sprung on you with no notice though, consider the implications for your future employment at the school. You may feel more comfortable politely withdrawing from the proceedings if you think that to 'bluff' would weaken your confidence.



Questions you may like to ask

You'll almost certainly be given the opportunity to ask questions of the interview panel, usually when they've finished questioning you. It is wise to have some questions prepared. The following may give you some ideas.

- What programme of induction does the school offer? How is the LA involved?
- Who will be my induction tutor? If it's the headteacher, will the role be shared with other staff?
- Are there opportunities to visit other schools to observe teachers, and to meet other newly qualified teachers?
- As a returnee to teaching, what induction can the school offer me?
- Will I be a form tutor? Is there pastoral support for tutors?
- What are the main challenges facing this school?
- What forms do the links with neighbouring schools or feeder schools take?
- Does the school have specialist teachers of personal and social education (in secondary schools)?

If all your questions are covered during the interview you can reply, when asked, that all your questions have been answered – it's clear then that you did have some! Don't feel that you have to ask a question at this stage.

Pitfalls to avoid

- Wait until you're asked before sitting down.
- Avoid colloquial language in your answers.
- Don't be tempted into confrontation, however contentious the questions seem to be.
- Don't forget that, although you're being assessed from the minute you walk into the school, the day should be a two-way exchange. You too are doing the assessing.
- Don't hide your enthusiasm at the interview.
- If you've taught before, never complain about former employers.
- Try to ensure that you meet all the key staff members you would be working with closely, such as your future induction tutor, your year/department head or, for returnees, the team leader who will be responsible for performance management.



Equal opportunities: your rights

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful to discriminate in employment against a person on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sex or sexual orientation.

Many LAs and schools/colleges have implemented their own equal opportunities policies. Although these may not have the force of law, they are normally designed to safeguard against discrimination on the above grounds.

If, during an interview, you're asked inappropriate and potentially discriminatory questions (those related to personal circumstances rather than to the requirements of the post), you are in a difficult position. You can exercise your right to decline to answer.

Interview panels should be sufficiently aware of equal opportunities requirements to avoid such situations. If asked inappropriate and potentially discriminatory questions, members should contact ATL immediately after the interview for advice (see page 46 for contact details).



After the interview

Once all the candidates have been interviewed, you may be asked to wait while the panel makes its decision. If this happens, the chairperson of the panel will invite one candidate back into the interview room to make an offer of employment. As soon as the panel has received oral acceptance, the remaining candidates will normally be told that the job has been offered to another applicant.



While you're waiting for the decision, make some judgements of your own. Would you accept the job if offered? What are your instinctive feelings about the job and the school? Could you be happy there?

On rare occasions, candidates may be released immediately after the interview and the whole process of offering and accepting the job may be carried out by telephone and letter. If this is the case for you and employment is not offered, you are still entitled to ask for a debriefing.



Accepting the post

If you receive a job offer, you may feel that you can't accept the post immediately, particularly if you have another interview in the immediate future for a job that you'd prefer, or you're waiting for the result of another interview.

Be honest with the panel and you'll usually be met with a sympathetic response. While you shouldn't expect them to wait too long for a decision, it would not be unreasonable to ask for 24 hours to decide whether or not to accept the job.

If you receive an offer of appointment you want to take up, you should initially make an oral, provisional acceptance (ie subject to receipt of all the final details of the appointment in writing).



If you change your mind about accepting a post

Be aware that if you change your mind and decide not to accept the job after formally accepting it (whether orally or in writing), you may be in breach of contract. If you do so after accepting at interview but before the written offer is sent to you, the breach of contract is not likely to have serious consequences, since the employer will probably be able to offer the job to the next best candidate without too much difficulty.

If you withdraw after accepting in writing, the employer may then find it difficult to fill the vacant post without placing further adverts, holding interviews and drawing together another interview panel. Should the employer be put to this additional expense due to your withdrawal, you may become liable for this expense if a decision is made to sue you for breach of contract.

While there have been very few instances of employers successfully suing prospective employees under these circumstances, it is obviously best to avoid getting into these difficulties. Be sure that you're clear about and happy with the details of the appointment before you formally accept. If you decide to withdraw your acceptance of the post, inform the employer immediately.

The next stage, once you've received the formal written offer of appointment, is to confirm your acceptance in writing. Remember that once you formally accept a job offer, both sides become contractually bound. Needless to say, you should be entirely certain about the precise terms and conditions of the post and details of the job description before you formally accept. If you have any doubts, seek extra clarification from the school or contact ATL for advice before going any further (see page 46 for contact details).

In your letter you should refer back to the employer's formal written offer and any other terms that have been agreed between you and the employer. These letters will then be evidence of all the terms of the contract.

Withdrawal of an offer

Sadly, it is not unknown for oral offers to be revoked after they have been made. This may also involve a breach of contract if a clear agreement had been made. However, it can be difficult to prove subsequently that a formal contract was in fact concluded, if there's nothing in writing. To protect yourself, you should always request written confirmation, setting out the terms and conditions, which you then accept by letter. If an offer was withdrawn in these circumstances, the exchange of correspondence could then be used as evidence of the employer's breach of contract.

If you are not successful

If you've been unsuccessful, don't automatically think the worst – it could be a blessing in disguise! Take out of the experience as much that is positive as possible, and develop the attitude that, if the job wasn't for you, there will be a more suitable one to apply for in the future. At the very least, the whole process is valuable experience and good practice.

If you are very keen to work at the school but did not receive an offer of a job, it's worth sending a letter to the school shortly after your interview to say how much you enjoyed your visit and that you'd like to be considered for future vacancies.



Making complaints

If there is any aspect of an application process that you're not happy with, particularly if you feel that equal opportunities may have been compromised (see page 41), you should contact ATL for advice without delay (see page 46). There is likely to be a complaints procedure, but it is important to take professional advice before taking this route.

Self-appraisal and evaluation

Regardless of the outcome of your application and interview, take some time to evaluate how things went and what you perceived to be your strengths and weaknesses. If you've been offered a debriefing, do consider what is said and how you might improve in the future.

It can be helpful to discuss any concerns with your tutor or a trusted friend, especially if you feel you were unsuccessful because of your interview technique. Above all, make a list of all the positive points from your application experiences so you have something morale-boosting to read before you apply for another post. Think about the things you wanted to say but didn't, and how you would answer questions differently next time.

Looking to the future

Making a successful application for a teaching job will probably be just the beginning of your continuing professional development.

If you can feel comfortable with the whole process of applying, being interviewed and enthusiastically selling your skills and abilities, you won't hold yourself back from any progress you deserve to make in the rest of your professional career.



How ATL can help

ATL is always on hand to offer advice and support to members in the following ways.

ATL representatives

ATL representatives in the workplace can offer members practical and personal support, and can be an invaluable colleague as they understand the environment in which you are working. You may also be able to talk things over with your student rep.

If you do not know your ATL rep, please contact your local branch secretary.

Your local ATL branch

Branch secretaries can provide help and advice to members from a local angle, especially on the guidance and expectations your LA will have for its NQs.

If you do not know the name/telephone number of your ATL branch secretary, please contact ATL on **020 7930 6441**.

Other ATL support and helplines

As an ATL member, you also have automatic access to:

- **ATL's member advisors: 020 7930 6441** during office hours.
- **ATL's out-of-hours helpline: 020 7782 1612** between 5pm-8pm, Monday to Friday during term time.

Both helplines provide confidential and personal support on any issue related to employment and are staffed by member advisors who are experienced in the issues facing NQs.

Apply yourself was originally written by Rae Ansley and Louis Campbell, both practising classroom teachers. Subsequent editions have been updated and revised by Elizabeth Holmes, a former head of history, who now writes extensively on education and health issues. Elizabeth is also author of *The NQT handbook* published by Routledge Falmer. See www.elizabethholmes.co.uk.

Acknowledgments also go to Jan Blakes and Brian Aikens.

ATL is the union for education professionals across the UK. Active in the maintained, independent and post-16 sectors, we use our members' experiences to influence education policy, and we work with government and employers to defend your pay, conditions and career development. From early years to HE, teachers to support staff, lecturers to leaders, we support and represent our members throughout their career.

For a free copy of ATL's publication catalogue, please call ATL despatch on **0845 4500 009**.

To receive the text of this book in large print, please contact ATL on **020 7930 6441**.

Whatever your query,
www.new2teaching.org.uk
from ATL has all the advice and support you
need to help you begin your teaching career.



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ATL product code: PE03

Date: August 2011

ISBN: 1-902466-20-9

Price: £9.99 (non-members)/free (members)

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