

A Guide to Return to Teaching

In recent months, organisations such as [WomenEd](#), the [DfE](#), [Flexible Teacher Talent](#), [Oxfordshire Strategic Schools Partnership Board \(SSPB\)](#) and the [Maternity Teacher/Paternity Teacher \(MTPT\)](#) have all been discussing ways to entice teachers who have been out of the profession for a while back into the classroom.

We know that women aged 30-39 represent the largest group of teachers leaving the profession every year – for reasons pertaining to family or otherwise. When teachers *do* leave to look after families, the NFER tell us that only half of them return.

Many schools have hosted events specifically aimed at returners; however these qualified teachers are hard to reach, let alone persuade to attend a meeting at a set time in a regional location.

How, then, do we support teachers who might be considering returning to the profession with the necessary information, inspiration and training? How do we ensure that their transition back into the classroom is on terms that ensure that teaching is a sustainable career choice?

It is hoped that the information below will serve as a comprehensive collection of links to share with colleagues looking to return to teaching. It includes helpful support and signposting to useful organisations, documents and case studies.

We have tried to bring together support material for all aspects of getting back into the classroom. The areas covered are as follows:

1. Gaining Experience
2. Job Hunting
3. Application Management
4. Preparing for the interview day
 - a. Research the school
 - b. Preparing for a lesson
 - c. Other activities/tasks you may be asked to do
 - d. The actual interview
 - e. Common interview questions
5. The Day of the Interview

An electronic copy (to access the hyperlinks) of this document is available on from www.sspb.org.uk -> click on the Return to Teaching tab at the top

1) Gaining Experience

Having had time out of the classroom, there are two things you will want to show a prospective employer: recent classroom experience, or up to date subject and pedagogical knowledge (or both!)

Recent Classroom Experience

Ideally, you want to do some teaching, but observing other teachers in your chosen phase will be useful. Think about having some time in other year groups or key stages to give you an insight into pupils' academic journeys and offer you some much needed experience to talk about at interview.

With the current shortage of teachers, forward-thinking schools will (hopefully) be open to proactive professionals contacting them. However, don't expect all schools to offer you time in the classroom straight away. You may need to meet the Headteacher, have a visit to the school and/or observe some teaching first.

Why not read [Dawn Stow's experience](#) of volunteering in a local school whilst on maternity leave, and how it transformed her teaching career?

Here are some tips that might help you get started:

- Sign up for a classroom experience through the [OTSA School Experience Programme](#)
- Contact your old school/s
- Ask teacher friends if they can help
- Ask the teachers/Headteacher at your children's school
- Do you know any school Governors who could help?
- Contact local schools or school in the area you wish to work
- Contact your local Teaching School or Multi Academy Trusts – a Google search will probably be the best way to find out who these are if you are not sure
- Ask to speak to the Principal's PA when you phone through to school receptions
- Contact the [Return to Teaching](#) Government website and register with them
- Prepare a CV and covering letter, then visit the school in person – this is a much more direct approach and does need a little more prep, but may get better results
- Be clear about what you want from the school, where you are willing to compromise, and how you are going to articulate this to Headteachers and administration staff who act as the gatekeepers to SLT members

Developing Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge

As well as lack of recent classroom experience, out-dated subject knowledge has also been identified as a barrier to returning teachers. Whilst the core of good instruction and effective relationship building with students remains timeless, curricula, exam board expectations and preferred teaching styles change quickly in education.

Demonstrating that you have been keeping up to date, therefore, will help to convince a prospective employer that you are the expert that they want for their students.

You'll observe some of this updated practice if you're able to volunteer in a school, but if childcare, current work commitments or a lack of positive response from schools prevents you from visiting, consider the following options:

- Exam marking is an excellent way to gain incredibly valuable subject knowledge that will be highly desirable to departments around the country
- Attending local and national conferences in your subject area, or attending workshops on specific pedagogies can get you up to speed. Here are just a few to explore – Google can help you further!
 - [WomenEd \(@WomenEd\)](#)
 - [Oxfordshire Women Leading in Education #OWLIE](#)
 - Primary Rocks Live
 - [National Association for Teachers of English](#)
 - [The Festival of Education](#)
 - Royal Society of Chemistry Teachers
 - [ResearchEd](#)
- [The MTPT Project's website](#) features a range of CPD opportunities that can fit around your current work or family commitments
- The MTPT Project offer a free two-module [Accreditation](#) process for teachers on parental leave, or for teachers who have taken time out of school to care for their families. Their flexible Accreditation is underpinned by coaching sessions and is designed to fit around the demands of your families, and personalised to your needs
- Facebook and Twitter have groups and hashtags dedicated to sharing lesson ideas and debating the latest educational trends

2) Job Hunting

Whether you need to gain experience or not, finding the right places to look for a job is essential. Below is a list of places to seek out your next teaching post:-

- [OTSA Jobs Board](#) – almost every school in Oxfordshire uses this website. The site also offers you the chance to upload your (*Applicant*) *Profile* and search *Schools' Profiles*. You can also sign up for *Job Alerts* for positions in a particular area, phase or school.
<https://jobs.otsa.org.uk>
- [Oxfordshire County Council website](#) – has jobs across the county under three headings: *Teaching Roles*, *School Support Roles* and *Leadership*. All are sub-divided into EYFS, Primary, Secondary and Special Schools.
<https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/teaching-and-school-support-vacancies>
- [Times Educational Supplement \(TES\)](#) – a site covering jobs nationally
<https://www.tes.com/jobs/>

- The Guardian Jobs – offers jobs nationally – many are leadership roles or hard to fill positions.
<https://jobs.theguardian.com/jobs/schools/>
- Return to Teach – an agency specifically matching teachers looking to work flexibly or part time with schools looking for flexible working solutions
- Social Media – if you are one of the thousands of teachers using social media, there are some fantastic opportunities:-
 - Twitter – there are a number of accounts that offer teaching jobs, be aware that many are supply or recruitment agencies. The following hashtag are also useful:-
 - [#teachingvacancyuk](#)
 - [#Teachingjobs](#)
 - Facebook – be aware many jobs advertised on here are through recruitment agencies
 - LinkedIn – be aware many jobs advertised on here are through recruitment agencies
- Supply and Recruitment agencies – there are many agents that could find you work, however most charge schools for the privilege
- The Shared Headship Network – this is simply a network (not a recruitment agency) for teachers looking for co-leadership and leadership job-share positions

3) Application Management

Applying for a job can sometimes feel overwhelming, but rest assured help is at hand. Before you begin, print off and annotate the job specification with specific examples from your previous teaching, your time out of the classroom, and your recent school volunteering and professional development. Aim to identify concrete examples of your experience, and the impact that your actions had on measurable outcomes.

On your application form

Do:

- Communicate your enthusiasm for teaching, your subject and the students with whom you hope to work
- Include the best examples from the annotations of your job specification
- Tell a strategic story that includes your time out of the classroom
- Ensure you address any points raised in the advert – schools will be looking for you to tick these boxes
- Show that you are committed to wider school community – tutor group, trips, extra curricular clubs
- Proof read – you don't want any spelling or grammatical errors... get someone else to read through if you can

Don't:

- Write a robotic list-like series of examples
- Claim to be the finished article – all teachers are a work in progress!
- Send a CV unless it is asked for
- Follow the word limits – if it says two sides, don't write four.
- Hide your time out of the classroom – instead, turn it into an advantage for the school

Below are links to articles, blogs and helpful hints as examples of different approaches:

- [How to write a great covering letter](#)
- [How to write a great personal statement](#)
- [Applying for leadership roles with confidence](#)
- [Getting shortlisted for a leadership role](#)
- [Helping you have interview success](#)
- [An interview into school leadership](#)
- Pivotal Education have put a great pack together: "*How to be amazing at interview*". It is made up of:-
 - [A podcast](#) – free
 - [A 17-page pocket guide](#) – good value at 99p

4) Preparing for the interview day

a) **Research the school:**

It's really important to do your homework on the school so you can talk confidently about what they are offering learners. Here's some good thing to research:

- Look at their website
 - Be familiar with the school's policies: Child Protection/Safeguarding, Teaching & Learning and Behaviour are usually a good place to start.
 - Read their newsletters
 - Look for articles from the local press online
 - Check their Ofsted report:-
 - A link to the report is usually on the school website or search the Ofsted website (<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>)
 - When was it last inspected? What does the report highlight as positives and areas for develop (these points could form questions or comments during the interview).
- N.B.** some schools may not have had an inspection for some time – check the date of the report before making any judgements!
- Is the headteacher the same person who was in post during the inspection?

b) **Preparing a lesson:**

You will be asked to teach during the day, usually to a group or full class. Normally, you will be given a topic and a set amount of time, ranging from 20 minutes to a full lesson of 60 minutes or more.

When preparing your lesson, remember to:

- Use your networks to explore the topic or learning objective that you have been given as a focus

- Practice delivering your lesson to an “audience” or to the mirror to check that you stick to timings
- Decide what you will do if things don’t go to plan – what are your priorities? Demonstrating that you won’t let poor behaviour go? Achieving at least the first activity? Responding to the needs of students who may be weaker or stronger than you anticipated?
- Touch base with a teaching colleague to remind you of the essentials – class profiles, seating plans, profiles of need, interactive whiteboards, updated ‘lingo’, outlining expectations
- Ensure you take everything you need for the lesson including memory sticks, resources and board pens
- Remember that the students don’t know that you’ve been out of the classroom for a while – teaching is like riding a bike, so walk into that classroom with confidence!
- If the Behaviour for Learning policy outlines a specific approach to managing low level behaviour, follow this

Here’s a couple of links with more detail for lesson preparation:

- [How to plan an interview lesson](#)
- [Ten tips for your interview demo lesson](#)
- Resources – teaching from someone else’s lesson plan is inadvisable, as it means you won’t feel as confident about your content, but if you do need some inspiration, take a look at the following:
 - [Teaching Ideas](#) – mainly EYFS and Primary
 - [Twinkl](#) – mainly EYFS and Primary
 - [Primary Resource](#)
 - [TES Resource](#)
 - For secondary resource it may be best to Google specific topics or resource
 - [The 5 min lesson plan](#)

c) Other activities/tasks you may be asked to do:

For some jobs, especially leadership roles, or roles with TLRs, you may be asked to do other tasks other than teach. Here’s a list that may be asked of you:-

- Meet the School Council (students)
- Lunch with the staff, governors and/or parents
- Presentation on a given topic
- Plan a lesson on a certain topic
- What would you do in certain scenarios (more usual in leadership roles)
- “In tray” tasks to test your ability to prioritise – read Emma Sheppard’s amusing blog [here](#)
- Data management tasks

d) The actual interview:

Expect more than one person on the interview panel, this may include the Headteacher, Deputy/Assistant Headteacher, Governor/s, Head of Faculty/Key Stage. Try to look cool, calm and collected...even if you're churning inside...and **SMILE!** Here are some excellent bits in preparation:-

- [Preparing for interview](#)
- [Perform your best in your teaching interview](#)
- [Job Interview Tips](#)
- [How to prepare for a school interviews](#)
- [Teacher Toolkit: Nail that job](#)

e) Common interview questions:

There is a danger to over prepare for questions. This can cause problems when you are trying to remember all things you want to include in your answer. You will almost certainly be asked:

- *Why do you want this job?*
- *Tell me about your experience*
- *What can you bring to the school/team/community?*
- You will be asked a Child Protection/Safeguarding question, but the actual terms "*Safeguarding*" or "*Child Protection*" will almost certainly not be included in the question – it will usually be a scenario with a child, staff member, parent or member of the public.
 - It is usually worth asking who the Designated Safeguarding Lead/Person is in a school prior to the interview – also look out for photos in reception. In Primary schools, this is usually the Headteacher (plus 1/2 others). In large Secondary schools, there may be a number of staff involved.
 - Refer to the school's policy (if you have it)
 - Here is a link to some helpful advice:
 - [A Star Teacher](#)
- At the end of the interview: *Do you have any questions?*

Here's some links to other popular questions:

- [TES: Possible interview questions](#)
- [Get into teaching: Common interview questions](#)
- [Teaching Community: 15 Popular Interview Questions Answered](#)

5) The day of the interview

The day of the interview can be hectic, particularly if you have other commitments like getting your children to get to school or nursery, so be prepared. The night before:

- Check you have everything you need for your lesson
- Know what you are wearing – you want to look professional (and consider having a change of clothes/ avoiding sticky children once you're dressed!)
- If you have been asked to bring anything along, like photo ID, ensure you have it.
- Get there on time – know where you are going and know how long it will take to get there
- Have the school phone number ready should you need it

At the interview

Do:

- Spend time getting to know the school. See an interview as a chance for you to audition the school, as much as how they are auditioning you. Is it right for you? Could you work there happily for the next five years? What do they do that is different from the school that influenced your decision to leave in the first place?
- Have an answer ready for "Why do you want the job?" Make sure the answer doesn't involve a reference to money or the distance to where you live.
- In your answers try to include references to staff and pupils you have spoken to during the day.
- Think of some honest compliments that you pay to staff and governors during the interview
- Prepare some questions for the end of the interview when you will be asked, "Do you have any questions?"

Don't

- Sit in the staff room all day when not occupied. Get out, walk around, talk to the caretaker/dinner ladies and most importantly the students.
- Take notes into interviews. Let answers be honest reactions not pre-planned speeches.

Childcare Logistics

Ideally, your children will be at school, in nursery or with a family member, friend or babysitter during the interview. Organising for someone else to do drop off and pick up on the day of your interview is likely to make things far less stressful. If this is not an option, inform your school in advance regarding your timings. If they are not flexible or understanding, despite your efforts to organise childcare, then they might not be the school for you.

If, however, you still have a nursing baby and need to feed them throughout the day, don't let this be a barrier to attending an interview.

Once you are shortlisted, call the school and ask to speak to their HR Manager. Explain your situation and give them a list of options that work for you:

- A room with a lock and a sink (not a toilet) and breaks to express
- A room for your partner, a friend, family member or babysitter to sit in with your baby for the day and breaks to feed
- Breaks for your baby to be brought in to feed, and somewhere for you to do this on school site or nearby

When asked, most schools will be very accommodating of your needs. If they're not, this is an illustration of a discriminatory and exclusive culture, and is probably not the right school for you.

Thank you to everyone who contributed and helped putting this booklet together.