

Chapter 1

Receiving Your Ticket to the Classroom

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Exploring your options for training as a teacher
 - ▶ Understanding the need for the Skills Tests
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Like just about anything worthwhile in life, becoming a teacher takes work and needs you to fulfil several requirements. One of these, whether you like it or not, is that you have to pass your Professional Skills Tests.

You may be a superb sports coach, a maestro in the music studio, an excellent exponent for English literature or a genius in the geography classroom. You may be able to inspire your pupils with enthusiasm for equilateral triangles, devotion to design technology or passion for the painting processes of Jackson Pollock. You may, in other words, be God's gift to the teaching profession, but without passing your Skills Tests you aren't going to reach even the first rung of the teaching ladder.

In this chapter, we lead you through a quick tour of the paths that you can take to become a teacher, providing information about what's required of you along the way. We also explain why you have to pass the Professional Skills Tests before you can enter a course of Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

Tracing the Routes to Becoming a Teacher

As the rather unpleasant saying goes, ‘there’s more than one way to skin a cat’. Likewise, you have more than one way into the teaching profession (and fortunately they’re all less messy and less damaging to the poor felines). Your task is to find the way that best suits you and your circumstances. If you’ve yet to make that decision, this section can help.

Passing the early stations en route to Teaching Central

No matter which route you take to becoming a teacher – and we outline plenty in this section – you encounter a number of common stops along the way:

- ✔ **GCSEs:** Having a Grade C or better at GCSE (or equivalent qualifications from other countries) in English and Maths has long been a pre-entry requirement for teacher-education courses.
- ✔ **Professional Skills Tests:** You’re reading this book, of course, because you need to pass the Literacy and Numeracy Skills Tests to be accepted onto a teacher-training course.
- ✔ **A degree:** To be a teacher, you require a university degree. You either need to hold a degree in advance of deciding that you want to become a teacher, or to earn one as part of your ITE.
- ✔ **Qualified Teacher Status (QTS):** To achieve QTS, you have to demonstrate to the university or school leading the training that you meet the Teaching Standards established by the Department of Education. At that point, the university or school recommends you for QTS to the Teaching Agency (TA), which is the body that awards the status (check out the Teaching Standards at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards>).



To look into all the available options for becoming a teacher in more detail than we have space for, visit the TA website at <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/teacher-training-options.aspx>



The information and guidance we provide in this chapter is solid. But your best course of action before making any decisions is to check with the universities and programmes that you're considering and make sure that you know the rules, regulations and requirements specific to them.

Pursuing an undergraduate degree

If you don't have a university degree and you want to train as a teacher, you can pursue a degree and work towards QTS (which we define in the preceding section) at the same time at university.



Two types of undergraduate qualification can lead to QTS:

- ✓ **Bachelor of Arts (BA)/Bachelor of Science (BSc) courses with QTS:** These courses provide an honours degree in a particular academic subject (such as English, Maths or Physical Education) alongside working towards QTS. Regular assessed school placements spread over the duration of the degree programme allow you to explore the *pedagogic* (that is, the theoretical and practical) approaches appropriate to the teaching of the academic subject in the school context.
- ✓ **Bachelor of Education (BEd) courses:** These programmes are honours courses in education. They're available for primary and secondary education, but given the usual requirement for secondary teachers to possess degree-level knowledge in a particular National Curriculum subject, BEd qualifications (which don't provide such a specialist focus) are much more common for primary education.

These two courses typically take three or four years to complete.

As with other undergraduate courses, you apply for entry to these programmes via the Universities and Colleges Applications Service (UCAS) at www.ucas.ac.uk.

Taking a postgraduate path

You have two options available if you have a degree in hand and decide that teaching is for you:

- ✓ **University-based training:** Led primarily by university and academic tutors.
- ✓ **School-based training:** Led primarily by a Training School.

These models involve a close partnership between universities and schools, because a balance of academic learning about education and pedagogy and practical application of these subjects through classroom experience is important. Teachers working in schools and university lecturers in education provide different but complementary perspectives on the work of the teacher.



Theory without practice can be abstract and unrealistic, and practice without understanding of the underpinning theory runs the danger of being simplistic and will not provide you with a detailed understanding of the complex processes at work in the classroom.

University-based routes

Postgraduate routes into teaching via a higher education institution (HEI) generally allow you to obtain a *Postgraduate Certificate in Education* (PGCE) with recommendation for QTS.



HEI-based PGCE routes are becoming increasingly rare because policy now favours school-based routes. As a result, numbers of training places allocated to universities for PGCE provision have been cut significantly. Check out the later 'School-based routes' section for the other ways of obtaining a PGCE.

A PGCE is an academic qualification that's often studied for and assessed alongside QTS. It allows students to explore philosophies and purposes of education, theories of how teachers teach and learners learn, the history of academic subjects and the ideas underpinning subject pedagogies.

PGCEs are awarded in two forms, though both require that you've already completed your first degree (usually in the subject you want to teach):

- ✓ **Professional level:** PGCEs at this level are assessed according to undergraduate criteria.
- ✓ **Masters level:** PGCEs at this level are assessed according to postgraduate criteria and carry Masters-level credits. These credits can be really useful if you want to go on to complete a full Masters in Education at a later date.



Check out carefully with your university whether the PGCE you're interested in carries Masters-level credits or not, because it can obviously have an impact on potential employers.



Strictly speaking, you don't *have* to have a PGCE; QTS is all that's required in order to work in schools in the UK. But many employers like to see that you also have the PGCE, which is seen as adding some academic rigour to the practicalities of QTS.

To gain access to most programmes you need a good honours degree (2:2 or higher), although the TA has sought to 'raise the bar'. In many cases a 2:1 or higher is now required, and in all subjects degree classification has a direct impact on levels of funding (see the nearby sidebar 'Show me the money!' for more on funding).

Also, with limited numbers of university-based PGCE places now available, admissions tutors can (and will) be much more selective. Entry criteria for PGCE programmes are, therefore, likely to become higher.

Show me the money!

The good news is that funding of up to £20,000 is currently available (depending upon subject and degree qualification) for a variety of university-based and school-based postgraduate routes into

teaching. For more information, take a look at <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/funding/postgraduate-funding>.



Overseas qualifications

If you qualified at an overseas university, you can still apply for any of the routes outlined here. Check out whether your degree and other entry qualifications (for example, GCSE English and Maths) are considered

equivalent by referring to UK NARIC, the national agency responsible for providing information and advice about how qualifications and skills from overseas compare to the UK's national qualification frameworks.



The TA claims that an A-level in the target subject plus any degree is enough to gain entry into a postgraduate programme, but the reality is that most HEIs have much higher benchmark entry criteria. So, if your dream is to become an English teacher but you have a first degree in Forensic Science, you're unlikely to gain a place.

PGCE programmes are available in full-time (FT) and part-time (PT) routes. FT routes take one year and PT routes up to two years. Please check carefully with individual HEIs, though, because not all HEIs are allowed to offer all subjects and only some subjects are available on a PT basis.



HEIs operate according to strict target numbers, and so early application for PGCE courses is advisable.

You have to apply for all PGCE courses via UCAS TT. See the website at <http://wwwucas.com/how-it-all-works/teacher-training> for further details about the application process.

School-based routes

As well as the university-based routes we outline in the preceding section, you also have a variety of school-based routes into the teaching profession.



School-based routes are open only to individuals who already hold a university degree.

School Direct

A new major route is School Direct (SD). Typically a one-year programme (though some schools may opt to offer part-time alternatives), SD exists for primary and secondary levels. The route is available to high-quality university graduates and leads to the award of QTS if you complete it successfully.

Training is led by a Training School, but a partner university is also involved in the programme. No fixed rules apply about how this arrangement must work in practice.

Some schools adopt a model in which, as a student, you're released for blocks of academic study at the partner university, where you prepare for a PGCE (we define the PGCE earlier in this chapter in 'University-based routes'). In other cases, the academic programme supplements the school-based one but doesn't lead to the award of a PGCE. Other schools develop bespoke relationships with universities in which teaching by university staff takes place in local clusters of schools or even in a single centre. Again, this arrangement may (or may not) lead to the award of a PGCE.



As you can see, a lot depends upon the nature of local partnership and assessment arrangements negotiated between the Training School and the partner university. The only way to be certain is to approach your chosen provider and ask!

School Direct exists in two versions:

- ✔ **SD Training:** see details above.
- ✔ **SD Salaried:** arrangements for application remain the same, but this route is normally open only to candidates who have three or more years' experience in work. Note, though, that this work can be in any field – it doesn't have to be in education. Successful applicants will receive a salary from their Training School – the clue's in the name! As with the SD route, places offered on this route also lead, if completed successfully, to the award of QTS and may carry the PGCE.



Funding of up to \$20,000 for the SD Training route is currently available depending upon subject and degree qualification. For information, check out <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/funding/postgraduate-funding>.

Application for School Direct places is also made via UCAS TT. For full details see <http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/teacher-training>.

School-centred Initial Teacher Training

School-centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) programmes are generally completed in a year (see <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/teacher-training-options/school-based-training/school-centred-training> for details). They lead to the award of the all-important QTS and some also to the PGCE.

As with the SD routes in the preceding section, SCITTs have to involve universities, but the relationship is somewhat different, because the route has to be validated by a partner university. So, although this route is primarily – as its name gives away – school-centred, the responsibility for assessment remains with the university.



The extent to which students following SCITT routes receive taught input from the validating university varies, and so check this aspect out carefully before you apply to make sure that the programme does what you want it to do.

Details of possible funding are available via the TA website (<http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/funding/postgraduate-funding>) and application for SCITTs is generally made via UCAS TT (see <http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/teacher-training>) – though look into this carefully, because it's not always the case.

Teach First

Teach First has a particular social and educational mission to work with schools operating in socially disadvantaged areas. As such, the schools it works with often provide very challenging (though potentially very rewarding) experiences.

To enter the Teach First school-based route into teaching, you need a minimum of a 2:1 degree or 300 UCAS points. (UCAS points are awarded for A-level grades and/or other post-age-16 qualifications.)



Teach First advertises a UCAS tariff in its entry criteria because so many of its applicants have yet to graduate. The 300 UCAS point indicator is, therefore, a benchmark for pre-graduation applicants. Participants (that's what Teach First calls students on its programme) who don't go on to obtain a 2:1 or a First Class degree are usually required to withdraw from the programme.

Teach First operates in ten regions:

- ✓ East Midlands
- ✓ Greater London
- ✓ Kent & Medway
- ✓ North East
- ✓ North West
- ✓ South West
- ✓ South Coast
- ✓ Teach First Cymru (Wales)
- ✓ West Midlands
- ✓ Yorkshire & The Humber

As an applicant you apply centrally to Teach First, indicating the region in which you want to work, though there's no guarantee regarding the region in which you'll be placed.

Teach First has no fees and offers an initial contracted period of two years: the first year paid as an unqualified teacher, the second year paid as a qualified teacher, assuming that the award of QTS is made at the end of the first year.

The programme begins with a Summer Institute that's HEL-based. Here you receive an intensive introduction to Professional Studies and Subject Studies in the area in which you're training to teach. All accommodation, travel and food costs for the period of the Summer Institute are paid, and so you don't need to worry about that!

Teach First operates its own assessment and admissions procedures: check out graduates.teachfirst.org.uk.

Getting qualified: Teachers without QTS

If you're already an experienced but unqualified teacher or an overseas trained teacher (OTT) who now wants to gain QTS, several options are designed specifically for your situation.

Unqualified UK teachers

If you're working unqualified in schools (maintained or independent) or in other related educational roles, you can take one of several specially designed routes to QTS:

- ✓ **Assessment Only (AO):** This programme is for teachers who can demonstrate that they've already met in full the requirements of the Teaching Standards. In this case, no formal ITE is required, but you still need to pass the Professional Skills Tests. You have to apply for AO routes directly to an 'accredited provider' – generally university-based programmes (see the earlier section 'Taking a postgraduate path').
- ✓ **Assessment-based route:** This option (different from the above in spite of its similar name) is for candidates for entry to teaching who require some, but a minimal amount of, additional training in order to meet the requirements of the Teaching Standards. This process is administered by the University of Gloucestershire, to which you need to apply (see <http://www.glos.ac.uk/courses/teachertraining/Pages/qts.aspx>).

Before considering application for this route, check the TA website (www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching) for current details, because not all phases of education and not all subjects are always available. And, yes, you do need to pass the Professional Skills Tests (there's no escape!).



Overseas experience

If you've been a teacher in a country other than the UK, your path to QTS depends upon where you previously taught:

- ✓ **European Union (EU):** If you're a teacher qualified in an EU state, your QTS is recognised automatically.

- ✔ **Australia, Canada, New Zealand and United States:** If you're a qualified teacher from one of these countries, you can apply directly to the TA to have your QTS recognised in the UK (subject to meeting Border Agency requirements in terms of right to reside and right to work in the UK).
- ✔ **Other countries:** If you trained in any other country outside the EU, the Overseas Trained Teacher Programme (OTTP) allows you to work in the UK for up to four years on an unqualified basis while gaining your QTS after you find a UK school to employ you. Known as Employment Based Initial Teacher Training (EBITT), the length of your training programme is determined by your EBITT provider.



You need to take the Professional Skills Tests only if you fall within the third category listed above.

Introducing the Professional Skills Tests

Before meeting the conditions for acceptance on an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) course to become a teacher, you need to pass the Professional Skills Tests in Literacy and Numeracy (for a complete description of these tests, turn to Chapter 2).



Professional Skills Tests have long been part of the landscape of teacher education, but as a candidate who wants to undertake teacher-education programmes you now have to pass these tests upfront. In other words, the tests are a pre-entry requirement.

Therefore, you no longer have the luxury of time and multiple opportunities to pass these tests. All offers to take up places on teacher-education programmes are conditional on the successful pre-course completion of the Professional Skills Tests: no pass, no place.

Taking the tests despite having the relevant GCSEs

Most people entering the teaching profession have already gained GCSEs (or equivalent qualifications from other countries) in English and Maths. In fact, proving that you have a Grade C or better at GCSE level in these subjects has long been a pre-entry requirement for teacher-education courses. Despite having these qualifications, however, and even if you have a degree or a PhD in English or Maths, you still have to take your Professional Skills Tests.

The reality is that even if you went straight to university from school and from there are now seeking to go straight into teacher education, five years have passed since you did your GCSEs. Taking into account gap years, employment, parenting and so on, for many people much longer periods have elapsed. After such a gap, being asked to undergo a new test of your abilities is quite reasonable.

Understanding why you have to do the tests

The rationale for the Professional Skills Tests is clear. Whether you aim to teach at primary or secondary level, and whatever your specialist subject, you need to be an effective and accurate user of language and numbers.

All teachers have to engage in the teaching of reading and writing to some extent. If you're a budding biology teacher who wants your pupils to be able to spell 'photosynthesis', you have to teach them (we cover spelling in Chapter 4). If you're a food-tech teacher and you want your pupils to write in particular forms and styles, that's down to you.



Plus, think about the many occasions when teachers have to use language in other aspects of their jobs: writing letters to parents, composing end-of-year reports, speaking at consultation evenings and so on. Turn to Chapters 5, 6 and 7 for all about punctuation, grammar and comprehension, respectively.

In addition, teachers (yes, even English teachers) need to be numerate – how else do you expect your pupils to read statistical data in non-fiction texts or present numerical material in their own writing if you don't teach them? As with English, teachers also need to use numeracy outside the classroom: working out examination results, analysing school and national performance data, and so on. We discuss the Numeracy parts of the tests in Part III of this book: mental arithmetic (Chapter 8), general arithmetic (Chapter 9) and statistics (Chapter 10). We supply useful numeracy practice questions in Chapter 11.

Don't forget that your literacy and numeracy abilities also impact on pupils and teaching colleagues. Teaching is a collaborative endeavour, and unless all teachers of all subjects reinforce the importance of, and demonstrate the effective use of, language and numbers, pupils' education is bound to suffer.

Like any policy or code of practice, weak performance by individuals has a knock-on effect. Accurate and creative use of language and numbers is important not only for effective communication, but also because your example as a teacher rubs off on your pupils. If you don't use these key skills accurately and confidently, and explicitly reinforce how important they are, the result is an adverse impact on the children you teach. If you don't value literacy and numeracy in your work, how can you expect them to do so?

Therefore, literacy and numeracy are vitally important for teachers and you can see why the authorities require you to show that you possess the basic skills in these areas. But you don't have to do so alone: we're here to help prepare you for the tests. As well as the specific chapters we reference earlier in this section, you may want to take a look at Chapter 2, where we describe the tests in detail, and Chapter 3, in which we provide some invaluable test strategies. We also supply timed tests for you to practise: on literacy in Chapter 12 and numeracy in Chapter 13. Try these out before you take the tests and nothing is going to surprise you on the day.

