

Those who *can* teach, teach teachers

New opportunities

In 2004 I made the move from junior school headship to tutoring and lecturing in a university primary PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) department. My school was, with almost 500 pupils and 23 teachers, considered to be quite large. Being part of a university with over 19,000 students is a different thing altogether. I am certainly finding it very exciting to be part of the hugely diverse and vibrant community that is the University of East London .

I have heard people say, 'Those who can, do; those who can't, teach; and those who can't teach, teach teachers.' Nowadays however, with the advent of Ofsted inspections for Higher Education and Initial Teacher Training (ITT) institutions, this can no more be the case, if it was ever true previously. Currently, ITT institutions that are graded 'good' by Ofsted are being expanded whilst those that fall below 'satisfactory' are forced to reduce their student intake.

I am fortunate to be part of an institution that is undergoing rapid growth thanks to recent favourable Ofsted inspections. The University of East London, for so long often viewed as a Cinderella amongst UK universities, is definitely going up in the world and is an exciting place to be with its state-of-the-art new complexes at Docklands and Stratford, close to the 2012 Olympic village site. As student numbers have risen, so too have those of staff – most of whom have been appointed in the last two years. This means most lecturers can draw on their own up-to-date, relevant school experience, something that is valued by teacher trainees and leads to better standards of teaching and learning in the department.

Positive partnerships

My appointment to UEL was primarily as a Partnership Tutor, with the remit of liaising with local schools and education departments in our eight partnership Local Education Authorities, in order to expand the number of schools that we link with for trainee placements for teaching



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practices. In this regard, I have already found that, having been a headteacher myself, I am better able to connect with school heads and senior staff and LEA advisers than I would have been otherwise. Cold calling schools, and representing my university department at Local Education Authority and Training and Development Agency meetings, would certainly have been scarier had it not been for my recent school management experience.

ITT academic staff have subject specific lecturing responsibilities. I have, this year, been asked to take on all the RE lecturing for the department. This has been very interesting and exciting. RE is a curriculum area that many teachers, both trainee and experienced, are worried about and often fight shy of, so empowering trainees to feel that this is both a do-able and worthwhile subject has been a privilege.

Terms and conditions

Contrary to popular belief, university and college lecturers get less, not more, holiday than teachers. Leave, only to be taken in university vacation time and pre-booked from an annual entitlement, is several weeks less in total than that of teachers. This can be a huge shock to the system! In addition to this, lecturers' salary scales are definitely lower than teachers' salary scales. Staff working in post-graduate departments are normally paid on the senior lecturers' salary scale in order to redress the balance, nevertheless many staff who make the switch from school to higher education take a considerable salary drop. That said, working in HE has its advantages too.

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University work still tends to be more relaxed and easy-going than school-based teaching. Settling in was, for me at least, not as easy as I had thought it would be, as everything was so different. I had been used to rigid structures and timetables, with the constant bombardment of things needing my

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attention – usually too many things at once. School life had all too often been a constant whirl of spinning plates. At university I appreciate being able to, for the most part, focus on one thing at a time.

Being part of a university staff brings access to libraries, sports centres and many other facilities. Staff are caring and professional development opportunities are good.

Learning curves

As a school manager I was used to having several administrative staff working for and with me, helping to produce all the documentation I required. Now I find myself doing everything on my own. I have had to climb some pretty steep learning curves as far as word processing and IT skills are concerned. But my computer confidence and skills have improved correspondingly.

All lecturers are expected to produce their own lecture notes and OHTs. Most use PowerPoint. Lecture planning and assignment marking time are built into the schedule, and some universities allow staff to work from home, with online access to the university computer network.

Because all HE institutions are intended to be research establishments, research time is included in lecturers' workload allocation. In the case of ITT departments, this is often a bit of an anomaly and perhaps sometimes even a sore point, as in practice, especially in PGCE departments, the courses are so intensive that there is little spare time for research and the production of scholarly publications and academic material. ITT is more like professional or vocational training than university study or research. As a result there can, understandably, be something of a gulf between education lecturers and other academic staff. Some of the ITT staff have little time for, or interest in, research.

Qualifications

University academic staff are often funded by their university to undertake MAs and PhDs themselves. Whilst their students are on summer vacation, the lecturers are revising course material, planning schedules and engaging in research. Not all education lecturers have MAs, although most are expected to be engaged in working for one if they

do not. As I do not have an MA, I am currently exploring the options open to me in this regard, and considering what areas of research I might be interested in. As for delving into the area of publication, this article is one of my early ventures!

One of the things that I have most appreciated about working in ITT, is that it is very evident that I am working in a team of equals. All the team I am part of have considerable experience in schools; all have been heads, deputies or leaders of departments. This expertise is valued and shared, and everyone is willing to offer up what they can. This is quite different from being school based which, even in the most collaborative of environments, is very hierarchical. It is definitely good for morale, and I am sure helps get the best out of those on the team.

Joy and freedom

Apart from attendance at MA lectures and occasional open days and research days, my evenings are my own again. There are no Governing Body or Parent-Teacher Association meetings to attend. There is still paperwork to do, but I don't feel buried under it any longer! Now, when I *need* to take paperwork home with me I find I am sometimes able to leave campus early and beat the rush-hour traffic. I don't remember *ever* being able to do that at school.

It is a great joy and privilege to be investing in the next generation of teachers. The trainee teachers are there because they want to be there and, although not all make the grade, in general the passing on of skills and information is enjoyable. Working with adults can be challenging, but it is also interesting and stimulating. Having spent all my working life living and working in East London, I am particularly pleased to be an active part of my university department's vision of training teachers from East London, in East London, for East London. My move from headship to lecturing has not felt like a step down, but a step out – into something broader. Not only am I educating educators, but I am also accessing new possibilities for extending my own education. I would certainly recommend it to those considering a change of direction.

■ Barbara Todd

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