

Applying for a Teaching Job

Some points worth bearing in mind, with many thanks to St Martin's College, Lancaster for their material and expertise.

Application forms

- Read the documentation carefully - follow the instructions (e.g. 'please complete in black ink').
- Pay close attention to presentation, handwriting and spelling.
- Photocopy the form so you can prepare a draft, then get it checked by someone else.
- Include any other qualifications such as coaching awards.
- The supporting statement/ letter of application is very important. (See below).
- Make sure that you demonstrate how you meet each of the criteria in the person specification.
- Do not submit a CV unless specifically requested.
- Ensure that all information is accurate. Never claim anything of which you are unsure. You may be asked about this at interview.

Supporting statement/ letter of application

- This is a very important part of your application.
- This is usually word processed.
- This should not be more than two sides of A4. Be concise. Don't cram it in. Use a reasonable size font (e.g. Times Roman 12) and sensible margins (2.5cm).
- You must demonstrate competence in all of the areas listed in the person specification.
- Highlight knowledge, skills, experience and responsibilities.
- Give examples wherever possible from your experience in schools, etc.
- Make reference to what you have studied, observed and taught.
- You can also include examples or experience gained from previous jobs, community work or voluntary work. Make sure you show how these are relevant to the post applied for.
- You could mention any interests or skills that would contribute to whole school life, e.g. languages, music, sports, etc.
- Again check your statement/ letter carefully. If it is overlong, be ruthless about cutting it to two pages. Make sure that you keep in everything that shows how you will meet the person specification. Many LEAs will not call you for interview if you do not meet this. You can tell them about your other capabilities at interview.

What is a job description?

A job description describes the duties and responsibilities of a job put into the context of the organisation and will usually include the following items:

- Details of the job in relation to the school.
- The main functions of the post.
- Duties and responsibilities.
- The standard of performance expected.
- The level of authority which the post holder needs to carry out the duties of the post.
- The other employees, departments and external agencies with whom the job holder will be expected to liaise on various duties.

What are the purposes of a job description?

A job description has seven main purposes:

- It defines the place of the job in the school.
- It clarifies the contribution the job makes to achieve the school's aims.
- It forms the basis for a person specification.
- It provides information for applicants about the job.
- It is the basis for the contract of employment.

- It forms the basis for job evaluation.
- It is a reference document to provide the basis for the manager and job holder to set objectives.

What is a person specification?

The person specification:

- sets out the skills, abilities, qualifications and experience needed to do the job;
- enables employers to determine who to invite for interview by comparing the application form and the letter of application with the criteria in the Person Specification;
- may set out how and where applicants are to indicate that they meet the requirements such as:
 - the application form;
 - the letter of application;
 - the interview;
 - a portfolio of work (e.g. for art teachers);
 - a sample lesson within a classroom;
- may indicate requirements that are:
 - essential, that is those minimum skills, qualifications or experience requirements which you must have in order to do the job. You must satisfy these to be invited for interview;
 - desirable, that is those requirements that are not essential, but are additional to the minimum requirement to do the job. In the event that all the applicants meet the essential criteria, the selection panel may use the desirable criteria to assess and decide which applicants meet the additional requirements of the job, and should be invited for an interview.

Preparing for an interview

Are you sure?

Before attending an interview, be sure that you really are prepared to accept a post at the school.

- Will you be happy in the area?
- What about affordable accommodation?
- Are the daily travel arrangements feasible?
- Do you find the ethos of the school agreeable?
- Is it really the kind of post, and the kind of school, you are looking for?

In addition to all the written information you receive, you can learn a lot about a school simply from the way the interview arrangements are planned. Be suspicious if you receive very little information, or if some things seem to be hidden from you.

- Does the school seem to give you the right messages when you visit it for your interview?
- Are you made to feel welcome, and is the day helpfully and sensibly organised?

If you are not the successful candidate and you are allowed to depart without a kind word, take comfort from the fact that your next application may take you to a more courteous and perhaps a happier school.

General

- Make sure you confirm as soon as possible that you will attend the interview.
- Before going, read through your copy application as they will have the original.
- Be clear in your mind as to how you will answer obvious questions such as those below:

- Why did you apply here?
- What are your strengths in terms of the job for which you are applying?
- What strategies have you used for classroom management and discipline?
- What is your approach to the teaching of reading?
- How have you assessed children? Why?
- What are the key strategies for meeting the needs of children with SEN?
- How will you promote equality of opportunity in the classroom?
- Dress in a way that is smart but comfortable. Avoid clothes that may be difficult to manage or distracting for the interviewer.
- Make sure you know exactly how to get there and how long the journey will take.
- Allow enough time in case there's a hold up on the train or due to traffic.
- If travelling by car, check that parking is available.
- Find out if you are to take anything with you such as children's work or photographs.
- Make a note of any questions that you want answered.
- Ask yourself, am I prepared to accept the job if offered it?

At Interview

- Relax, sit back, smile.
- Do not be afraid to ask the panel to repeat a question.
- Do not try to answer if you do not understand.
- Answer fully but do not over elaborate. You can always pause and ask, "Do you require further detail?"
- Try to let your personality come through. Interviews are arbitrary and often the premise is you are capable to teach and are academically sound so the panel will be looking at you as a person as well as a future teacher.
- As an NQT much of the interview may be about you as a person. It is later in your career that your knowledge and skills in teaching will become more important.
- At the end of the interview you will be asked if you want to ask any questions. Prepare for this. If your question is covered during interview then say so. You do not have to ask a question.
- You may find you are offered a job and possibly asked to accept or decline it then. You should ask whether it is a permanent contract. If not then how long is it?
- Find out if the panel is making a firm offer or if you are just being placed in a pool system.
- It is normal practice for LEA to require applicants to confirm acceptance of an offer in writing. However, even a verbal acceptance constitutes a contract and is to be considered unprofessional behaviour to continue applying for other teaching posts, even if one is advertised which you much prefer.
- Be sure to convey the impression that you want to teach – sound enthusiastic!

'Please come in and sit down...'

- Look at the interviewer. Don't gaze at the ceiling or the floor. Smile when it is appropriate to do so, but avoid the nervous fixed grin.
- Sit still, but not like a ramrod. Don't fidget. Avoid finger clasping, thumb twiddling, leg wobbling, knee hugging, ankle grasping, foot tapping, nose scratching, tie straightening, hem tugging, sock pulling, and wiping hair away from your face.
- Unless a member of the panel is formally introduced as the chairman (it is then correct to address your remarks to the chair), speak directly to each individual questioner. Don't keep turning back to the head teacher, as if he or she is the only person who matters. The person in the far corner who says very little may turn out to have the greatest influence.
- Answer the questions fully, but don't talk too much. Avoid jargon and acronyms (no differentiation or DLOs). Watch the questioner for signs of boredom or impatience.
- If you do not understand the question, say so. Some interviewers may not be experienced in putting coherent questions, and a polite request for clarification is quite in order. Don't fall into the trap of answering what you thought or hoped the questioner was going to ask, and then getting yourself into a complete muddle.

- Don't assume that everyone has remembered what you wrote in your letter of application. Never appear to suggest that the questioner ought to have spent more time reading it. ('If you look at my C.V., you will see that I have already covered that point.')
- Some governors may not be familiar with your subject. If you are asked an apparently foolish question, don't show your irritation. Don't try to appear superior, and don't attempt to score debating points. Other members of the panel will note how you deal with a silly or naïve question.
- In some subjects (art, for example) you may wish to bring samples of your work, but don't assume that everyone is desperate to see them. Unless it has been made clear that a display is welcomed, keep your visual aids to a minimum. Passing lots of little photographs around is not a profitable activity for an interviewing committee.
- Your manner should never suggest condescension, complacency or self-satisfaction. Never give the impression that you are doing everyone a favour by being there.
- At the end of your interview thank the panel for inviting you and withdraw gracefully. Don't attempt to shake hands unless the gesture comes from the interviewer. And don't slam the door.

How to make them think twice about you...

- 'I prefer to teach just the younger and more able children.'
- 'I have a lot of domestic commitments and I wouldn't want to be involved in after-school activities.'
- 'Of course, I'm really hoping to get a place on the MA course.'
- 'I could only consider it if the salary took account of the three years I spent in Tibet before I qualified.'
- 'I couldn't start before the middle of September because my holiday is booked.'
- 'I'm afraid I couldn't be available on Mondays because that is my yoga class.'
- 'Well, I admit that the short hours and long holidays are a great attraction.'
- 'Well that's me settled. Now, my wife/husband/partner is also looking for a job'

Finally...

Be prepared to be asked to teach a group or class, and to be observed, something that you should already have had plenty of experience of during your degree.

Good luck!