

A day in the life of a Further Education teacher



Ursula Lowe is a Further Education (FE) science lecturer at Cambridge Regional College teaching the popular Access to Higher Education courses and day-release BTEC Diplomas. Ursula completed an MSc in Analytical Chemistry at the University of Salford followed by a PGCE in FE at the University of Manchester. Ursula has completed a STEM Insight work placement at the University of Cambridge and won the prestigious ENTHUSE Award for Excellence in STEM teaching (Further Education) in 2016. She enjoys professional development, writes a Wordpress blog STEM527 and tweets @ursula17LO. Lorenza Giannella (Training Manager, Biochemical Society) speaks to her about her work.

How did you get into teaching?

Whilst at University as a post-graduate student, I was asked to be a facilitator in undergraduate practicals and to mark some laboratory reports. The local technical colleges were also looking for suitable people to teach aspects of chemistry and biochemistry. I was recommended by my tutors and was offered some part-time teaching. After university, I studied for a Postgraduate Certificate in Education and then looked for full time lecturing positions in further education.

Can you describe a typical day?

At Cambridge Regional College, the working day is 8.30-17.15. I cycle to work for 8am and check the teaching room is tidy, switch on the computer and prepare the desktop. I print out any materials on coloured handouts for learners with particular needs, set up the room for demos or practical sessions and check my emails for potential student absences. Classes start on the hour and finish so that students can start their next class on time, which often means no break for the lecturer. Lunch is an hour anytime between 11 and 3 depending on the timetable and is often reduced to 25-30 minutes

if a student needs to drop in for a one-to-one, or if there are any administrative tasks to carry out. Generally, afternoon classes finish at 16.00 but sessions for part-time students, such as apprentices, can finish much later, so that means my working day is extended too.

What's the most interesting project you've worked on?

My most interesting projects have included my postgraduate work, which involved analysis of pesticide residues using electroanalytical methods, and the Access to Higher Education Science Practical Project. Each year, students pick their own specialism (biology, chemistry or physics) applications, and I support them in carrying out their practical project, building their skills of problem solving, evaluation and analysis. I also learn a lot as I have to research their topics too.

What is your advice for someone who would like to pursue a career in teaching?

Teaching is a vocation. If it's something you're interested in, give it a go. In science, most further education lecturers have a degree and a postgraduate or teaching qualification, which can be taken part time whilst on the job. There are

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long hours outside of work and very little thanks sometimes. Like other areas of teaching, Further Education holiday entitlement is usually in peak season and, at 42 days, is less than for teachers in schools. Salaries are typically lower too. However, the curriculum is much broader than in schools (not just GCSEs and A-level), and changes regularly depending on what is best to meet the needs of employers, or what is fashionable.

What do most people not realize about your job?

The range of courses and levels that are taught up to level 4/5 HNC/HND and the amount of resources we prepare, since we don't use off the shelf GCSE or A-level material, but more bespoke ones. The timetable changes each year, so a course will run if there are enough students to enrol. If not, you have to find something else to teach, and you do build up experience and confidence to do this.

What inspires you about teaching?

I enjoy meeting new people, whether that is students, employers or fellow lecturers and scientists at continuing professional development (CPD) sessions. It's wonderful when you ignite that spark of interest in a learner and see the educational distance travelled. Attending college can also improve their softer skills, such as communication, confidence and team work. I am still waiting to say I have taught a Nobel Prize Winner!

What's been the greatest challenge in your career so far?

The STEM Insight work placement I completed at the Department of Biochemistry at Cambridge University during the February 2016 half-term and the accompanying CPD assessments throughout the six months. It's a great way to learn new things, like using social media, network and fresh approaches to learning and resources. It rejuvenates the desire to remain in education, stay student focussed and rise to the challenge of the political and financial constraints placed on FE colleges. In 2017-18, I hope to get to grips with the wonders of Office 365 and undertake further subject specific CPD and continue lifelong learning. ■

Job Profile – Teacher

A teacher educates pupils in a certain subject, inspiring and supporting them in achieving their full potential. He/she can work in primary, secondary school or in further education colleges, supporting students in acquiring knowledge, develop new skills and prepare them for assessments.

Responsibilities

Responsibilities include preparing and delivering lessons, assessing and recording progress, managing students' behaviour and keeping up to date with the subject area.

Qualifications

Minimum standard GCSE qualifications (or equivalent) in English and Maths are essential (grades and qualifications vary depending on country of training). If your undergraduate degree is not a Bachelor of Education (Bed) or a BA or BSc with qualified teacher status/teaching qualification, you will need to complete a Postgraduate Certificate in Education.

Independent schools, free schools and academies may hire teachers without formal teaching qualifications.

Salary and career development

Newly qualified teachers start on the main pay range, which rises from £22,467 to £33,160. Teachers may move into year group leadership or management roles, with a subsequent salary increase. Independent schools, free schools and academies set their own salaries.



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