



Becoming a teacher

Nation guide

Northern Ireland 2023/2024

Careers and Employability Services

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The University wishes to emphasise that, while every effort is made to ensure accuracy, changes in regulations or in policy means you should not solely rely on the information in this guide. Please make sure you check all information carefully and regularly before making any final decisions.

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1. Introduction: Considering teaching as a career

This nation guide is part of a series which includes teaching in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland and has been produced by The Open University Careers and Employability Services (CES) to help prospective and current students who are considering teaching as a career. The contents are subject to change, so please make sure that you check all information carefully and regularly before making any final decisions.

Making the decision to train to be a teacher is just the start of your journey. There are entry requirements to meet, different routes to becoming qualified to consider as well as the process of applying for initial teacher education (ITE). Once qualified there are then the demands of finding your first role and this is all before being in charge of a group of students for the first time.

This guide outlines some of these issues but it is important that you continue to seek advice throughout your studies.

What makes a good teacher?

There are far too many attributes to list in establishing what makes an effective teacher and probably some subjectivity as well. Enthusiasm for teaching, although important, is not enough. The work of a teacher is complex, demanding and sometimes stressful. Additionally, teachers will know that the reality of the hours they work are beyond those that are timetabled, and workload issues are well publicised.

That said, there can be tremendous job satisfaction. However, you might want to consider the following questions.

- Am I passionate about education and making a difference to those I will teach?
- Can I demonstrate the consistent high standards of personal and professional conduct required to uphold the trust of my students, colleagues, and profession?
- Am I reflective, resilient and open minded enough to adapt, embrace change and develop my practice as education evolves during my professional career?

Just remember that your age and background are not an issue. One of the strengths of the profession is that it attracts applicants from all walks of life who do a fantastic job. Mature entrants have life experience that is welcomed and of great value to the teaching profession.

You can learn what being a teacher is really like with the free OU FutureLearn course – [Becoming a Teacher](#). This course is for anyone thinking about becoming a teacher, it will help you to decide if teaching is for you, give you a sense of what teaching is really like and help you to start writing your application for initial teacher education.

Work experience will help you decide

Before you make your final decision to teach it is wise to gain some experience of working in the age range and setting you wish to teach. You'll also develop valuable insight into the day-to-day duties of a teacher as it is impossible to get a real flavour of the profession from research alone. Attaining relevant work experience is desirable prior to applying for the training routes into the profession so this is something you will need to start thinking about early on. Above all else getting classroom experience will help you decide if teaching is the right career choice for you.

If you already have some classroom experience, you may want to consider other experiences that can add value.

You'll find information about ways to build relevant experience in [Skills and experience](#).

What age range do you want to teach?

This is a really important question you'll need to answer before you apply for entry onto initial teacher training. In Northern Ireland children aged four to sixteen in grant-aided schools must follow the curriculum:

- Pre-school / Foundation Stage: typically, 4-6 age range
- Primary: typically, 6-11 age range.
- Post-primary: typically, across 11-16, 11-18 or 14-19 age range.
- Further Education: typically, 16+
- Higher Education: typically, 18+

The Education System in Northern Ireland, whilst sharing many of the characteristics of other jurisdictions within the UK, does have some unique aspects, particularly in relation to curriculum, assessment and post-primary structures. See an overview of the Northern Ireland curriculum on the [Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment \(CCEA\)](#) website.

Availability of teaching posts and training places

The availability of teaching posts, and the supply of qualified teachers across the age ranges to fill them, is a complex picture in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland education system is made up of different types of schools controlled by management committees, which are responsible for employing teachers. Unlike the rest of the UK, teaching in Northern Ireland is an **oversubscribed profession**.

You can view, when published, the approved intakes to Initial Teacher Education courses for 2023/24 (and previous years) on the [Department Of Education website](#).

Competition for entry onto initial teacher training courses **and** post qualification teaching jobs is very competitive. As competition for jobs is high, many qualified teachers seek supply roles or teaching positions outside Northern Ireland. Teachers must be registered with the [Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register](#) to be employed as a substitute teacher.

So, you want to become a teacher?

You will need to ask yourself some questions about your experience and goals in relation to getting into teaching. Whatever your current situation, you should thoroughly research the appropriate choice of modules for your degree and check the entry requirements with each initial teacher training (ITT) provider you are applying to.

Question 1: Do you have experience in the age range and setting you want to teach and feel confident this is the right career for you?

If not, read [Skills and experience](#) for ideas on how to gain experience.

Question 2: Do you meet the entry requirements for teaching?

If not, read [Training to teach in N. Ireland](#) for advice on your training options. Also read [Frequently asked questions](#).

Question 3: Do you know which training route you will take?

If not, read [Training to teach in N. Ireland](#) for advice on your training options. Also read [Frequently asked questions](#).

Question 4: Are you happy with your study pathway and module choices?

If not, contact your Student Support Team if you are a current Open University student.

Finally, make sure you understand the timescales of when you will need to apply for initial teacher training. If you need further support visit the OU's [Careers and Employability Services](#).

2. Where to start

Many OU students enter teaching and, in general, a degree from the Open University is very appropriate preparation. However, the choice of what you study can be critical in ensuring that you gain entry into initial teacher training and ultimately get a job in the teaching profession. The BA/BSc Open (Honours), tailored to your own requirements (also known as the Open degree), might be a useful choice for teaching but you must ensure that the modules within the degree are appropriate for the age range and setting you wish to teach.

Many initial teacher education (ITE) providers will ask for at least 50% of your degree to cover the subject knowledge they require. A degree in the specialist subject area you wish to teach is particularly appropriate for the secondary sector, further education and higher education sector.

Please be aware that in assessing your suitability to teach, initial teacher training providers may have differing views on your module and degree choice. You are strongly advised to check this out with each provider you may wish to apply to before embarking on your degree (or as soon as possible if you are already studying). You also need to ensure that you keep regularly up to date with changing requirements in this area. You may need to do this **each year** that you are studying with the OU, to ensure that you are still on the right track towards a teaching career.

OU students should be aware that, depending on when you take your final module, your degree may not be awarded until December. Most initial teacher training providers will expect you to officially have your degree classification confirmed **before** you start teacher training. Please check the entry requirements, including expectations on your degree content, with

any teacher training providers you are considering or have applied to, as these can change year on year.

If you have an overseas qualification, an incomplete qualification from another institution or a professional qualification and you are not sure you meet the entry requirements for initial teacher training you should check this with your chosen teacher training provider.

If you are a current student, after reading this guide, you may want to talk in more depth to one of the OU's Career and Employability Consultants about your application for initial teacher training. You will find a range of materials and support on the [Careers and Employability Services website](#). Information and advice on choosing qualifications and modules at the OU can be accessed from the [OU's prospectus](#).

What are the entry requirements for a career in teaching?

Here we will focus on the main academic and non-academic requirements for teaching in early years, primary and post-primary. Teaching in Northern Ireland is an all-graduate profession. There are four institutions offering programmes of Initial Teacher Education: Queen's University School of Education, Saint Mary's University College, Stranmillis University College and Ulster University. You will find requirements for further education and higher education in [Training to teach in Northern Ireland](#).

Academic requirements

- For postgraduate teacher training programmes, you will need to hold an undergraduate degree awarded by a higher education provider in the UK, or a recognised equivalent.
- You'll need to have achieved a standard equivalent to grade C/4 or above in GCSE English and mathematics.

- If you intend to train to teach pupils aged 3 – 11 (early years and primary), you must also have achieved a standard equivalent to a grade C/4, or above, in a GCSE science subject.

Non-academic requirements

You will also need to consider:

- Classroom experience in the age range and setting you wish to teach. See [Skills and experience](#) for how to arrange this.
- Providers have a responsibility to ensure you have the health and physical capacity to undertake teacher training. See [Resources and support for potential teachers with a disability](#) of this guide for further guidance.
- Candidates must satisfy 'fitness to teach' requirements and be checked by [Access NI](#) before entering schools.

An option for OU students who need a GCSE in English, maths or science is to take this at the [National Extension College](#) via distance learning. It is also possible sit GCSEs via an evening class at a local further education college or adult education provider. For more information about the OU maths modules and their equivalence to GCSEs and other qualifications, go to the [OU Maths Choices](#) website.

If you have qualifications from outside the European Economic Area (EEA), the [UK National Information Centre for the recognition and evaluation of international qualifications and skills](#) (UK ENIC) can give advice on whether qualifications are equivalent. They may also be able to provide certification.

If you are in the position of having secured the necessary GCSE grades you require but cannot find proof of your results you will need to contact [CCEA](#), or the examining body you sat your exam with, who can provide a certified statement of results for its general qualifications (i.e. GCSE and GCE), and its vocational qualifications.

PGCE providers may not accept OU modules as equivalent to GCSEs. Before you embark on study for any alternative qualifications, it is important that you check whether the institutions you wish to apply to will accept these instead of GCSEs.

3. Skills and experience

As well as the knowledge gained from OU study, students develop many transferable skills and attributes that are highly valued by employers. Being able to juggle OU study with work and family commitments involves time management, self-reliance, problem-solving, resilience and prioritising tasks effectively. You may want to do a more in-depth analysis of your skills and achievements using the resources on the [Careers and Employability Services](#) website or with [Your Career Planning Guide](#). This will help you identify and evidence your strengths.

Teachers wishing to take up a post must have eligibility to teach and be registered with the [General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland](#) (GTCNI). Those who trained outside Northern Ireland must apply to the GTCNI to have their qualifications assessed and approved prior to registration.

Getting work experience

Why do I need work experience?

Above all else, getting classroom experience will help you decide if teaching is the right career choice for you. You'll develop valuable insight into the day-to-day duties of a teaching role. It is impossible to get a real flavour of the profession from research alone. Recent work experience in the age range and subject you want to teach can also be helpful for your application and any interview for initial teacher training. You can often build your experience as you study. Initial teacher education providers may expect to see evidence of relevant work experience, especially when places are oversubscribed.

What additional experience would be useful?

You aren't just limited to work experience in a formal education setting. You may wish to add to this with experience in different settings such as summer camps, after school clubs and scouts. The list really is endless in the ways volunteering or paid work could enhance your suitability.

You could also try and get experience in more than one setting and age range. For example, if you are interested in teaching primary you could try and get experience in more than one school. You may also want to consider other experiences such as private tutoring, sport coaching, mentoring or volunteering that puts you in touch with your target age range. Some students have even completed TEFL training (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and taught both in the UK and abroad. There are also exchange programmes such as [The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme](#) and the British Council scheme - [Teach abroad as an English language assistant](#).

In summary, you will need to start your planning on this early before you apply to teach, as it can often take time to sort out arrangements and find the time to commit to these experiences. Do read through the [Prospects guide](#) for further ideas on securing teaching experience.

How much work experience do I need?

The requirements on prior school experience varies between initial teacher training providers which is why all applicants should check these expectations first (Ulster, Stranmillis and Queens Belfast all set expectations of school experience in their entry requirements for their PGCE programmes). Although there is no formal guidance on the number of days you should try and secure, at least two weeks or more is advisable. If possible, your school-based experience should predominately be in the age range and subject (if applicable) you want to teach. Ideally,

experience should also be recent, within the last 12 months, but many providers will consider the last 2-3 years.

How can I arrange getting school experience independently?

This is often the most effective route to getting work experience and usually requires some confidence and perseverance on your part in getting it organised. You may also be able to arrange visits through personal contacts or with schools where you were taught. It may be possible to arrange with a local school via a speculative application

The [Targetjobs](#) website also has some hints and tips about gaining experience.

Making the most of your experience

It's useful to break down your thoughts and activity into before, during, and after your work experience. Before any placement write down what you want to learn from the experience and what information you want to know. This might include researching the school you are going to and understanding the roles of teacher and support staff.

During your placement, make a record of any creative and innovative teaching styles you have observed and how lessons are tailored to cater for students with different abilities and backgrounds.

After your experience, decide if there are still gaps in your knowledge and whether you need further experience. Write a reflective account that can be used for a personal statement.

Getting paid experience

As well as volunteering, many OU students are already working or seeking roles in education whilst they study such as [teaching assistant](#), [special educational needs \(SEN\) teaching assistant](#), [private tutoring](#) and [learning mentor](#). Some students may decide to delay applying for initial teacher

training and look to gain additional educational experience to further develop their skills and confidence.



4. Training to teach in Northern Ireland

To teach in a primary or post-primary (secondary) school in Northern Ireland, you must have a degree and a recognised teacher training qualification. All teachers are required to register with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI).

There are two routes available to prospective teachers: a four-year undergraduate Bachelor of Education (BEd), or a one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Initial teacher education (ITE) programmes are available from the following universities and colleges in Northern Ireland:

- Queen's University Belfast, School of Education
- Saint Mary's University College (Belfast)

- Stranmillis University College (Belfast)
- Ulster University (Coleraine)

Undergraduate Bachelor of Education (BEd) full-time, four-year courses in Northern Ireland.

St Mary's University College: A College of Queen's University Belfast

- A four-year BEd (Hons) course directed at primary level teaching.
- Four-year BEd (Hons) course directed at post-primary level teaching.

Stranmillis University College: A College of Queen's University Belfast

- A four-year BEd (Hons) course directed at primary level teaching.
- Four-year BEd (Hons) courses directed at post-primary level teaching.

PGCE courses in Northern Ireland.

The following institutions provide Initial Teacher Training in Northern Ireland:

Queen's University Belfast offers:

- One-year PGCE post-primary courses in English, mathematics, science, modern languages, religious education, social science, information technology/computing, Irish medium education (in association with St Mary's University College).

Ulster University (Coleraine) offers:

- A one-year PGCE primary course.
- A one-year PGCE post-primary (for university graduates holding relevant degrees) course. Subject specialisms include art and design, English with drama and media studies, geography, history,

home economics, Irish medium education (in association with St Mary's University College), music, physical education and technology and design.

St Mary's University College Belfast offers:

- A one-year PGCE primary course for teaching in Irish-speaking schools.

Stranmillis University College offers:

- A one-year PGCE primary course for teaching early years.

Early Years teaching

In Northern Ireland all nursery schools are required to employ a qualified teacher for each class. Other providers (i.e. in the voluntary and private sector) are required to arrange support from a qualified teacher or other suitably qualified early years specialist to raise standards and help prepare children for school.

Early year's provision includes Sure Start, the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) and Foundation / Reception and Key Stage 1 classes. Within these there is a mixture of statutory and private / voluntary provision, each of which has different requirements around staff qualifications, staff / child ratios, inspection, and different levels of funding. Responsibility for early years and childcare provision is spread across a number of departments and bodies and [qualifications for early years specialists](#) vary.

[Stranmillis University College has a PGCE in Early Years.](#) This PGCE course will lead to 'Eligibility to Teach' status which is granted by the Department of Education. With this qualification students will be able to seek employment in nursery schools and/or primary schools in a Foundation (Years 1 and 2) or Key Stage 1 (Years 3 and 4) class.

PGCE Primary teaching

Ideally your degree would be appropriate to a primary education subject area, however it may be helpful for an OU degree (360 credits) to have at least 240 credits as a single subject core. Although 180 credits can be regarded as a minimum, many head teachers welcome job applicants with a stronger subject background who will be capable of taking the curriculum lead in a specific subject area within the school.

It is for you to decide whether to take your remaining credits in other school subject areas, or further strengthen your subject expertise in your main area of study. We strongly advise you not to spread your modules too widely across the school curriculum, but to cluster them in one or two areas so that the specialism you offer to any future employer is clear.

Please note that some primary PGCE providers may accept non-curriculum-based degrees, e.g. psychology, social sciences, etc. However, you are strongly encouraged to check this out with individual providers you may wish to apply to.

An honours degree (360 credits) with a 2:2 classification is usually considered the minimum requirement for entry to teacher training. Many initial teacher education providers will stipulate a 2:1. If you do not meet this criterion, for example if you have an ordinary degree (without honours) or a third-class honours degree, we highly recommend you contact the providers you intend to apply to.

For more information see the [Council for the Curriculum](#) website and [Examinations and Assessment](#) and click on 'Key stages 1 and 2'.

All institutions offering PGCE courses must satisfy themselves that **the content of an applicant's previous education provides the necessary foundation for work as a primary teacher**. It is therefore very important that you check with a primary PGCE provider that your proposed degree

will be appropriate. This does not mean that your degree has to have covered all or even most of the subjects in the [primary curriculum](#).

You should also ensure that you meet all the other requirements for entry to primary teaching. You must have a GCSE (or equivalent qualification) of grade C or equivalent in English language, mathematics and science.

In order to teach in a Catholic maintained nursery or primary school in a permanent capacity, teachers must hold the recognised [Certificate in Religious Education](#).

If you are in any doubt, you should seek advice from the institution you are applying to for initial teacher education. Your student support team is also available to help you should you wish to discuss your programme of study.

PGCE Post-Primary teaching

Entry requirements to a Post-Primary PGCE course in Northern Ireland. You must have:

- English and Mathematics (GCSE grade C or equivalent).
- An honours degree, normally in the specialist subject of an appropriate NI curriculum subject. In the case of a combined honours degree, at least 50% should be in the specialist subject. (N.B. The normal minimum offer standard is a 2:2 Honours).
- All applicants need to provide evidence of knowledge, interest and experience in working with young people of post-primary age.
- All applicants need to provide evidence of experience working with young people preferably in the school environment. Many course providers insist on a minimum number of days' observation focused on your subject in a secondary school other than the one you attended.

OU students should be aware that, depending on when you take your final module, your degree may not be awarded until December. All initial teacher education providers will expect you to officially have your degree **before** you start on their postgraduate programmes. Please check the rules of entry with any ITE providers you are considering, well in advance of applying, as rules can change every year.

Applying for primary and Post-Primary initial teacher training

Applications to the four-year BEd (Hons) course at St Marys University College - apply directly to the college.

For the four-year BEd (Hons) course at Stranmillis University College, you will need to apply through the UCAS Undergraduate scheme.

Applications to PGCE courses are made directly to the university or college. Check the provider's website for specific course information, tuitions fees, and entry requirements.

Closing dates for Primary PGCE are usually the first week in November for Ulster University and usually February for St Mary's University College and Stanmillis University College.

Closing dates for post-primary PGCE are usually the second week in November for Ulster University and usually the first week in November for Queens University Belfast.

NB: Check the institutions websites for specific details in relation to entry requirements, application methods and closing dates.

You **should apply as soon as possible** to give yourself the best chance of getting the teacher training place you want. For many OU students they will be applying for initial teacher training whilst they study their final module. Your **degree result will need to be confirmed prior to commencing**

teacher training. The majority of OU students will have their classification confirmed by late July, although for a minority of students, depending on when you take your final module, your degree may not be awarded until December.

Further education teaching

There are two main routes to becoming a further education college lecturer in Northern Ireland.

With an existing teaching qualification

You can become an FE lecturer if you hold a [recognised existing teaching qualification at the time of application](#):

- Bachelor of Education Degree (BEd) obtained in the UK or Ireland.
- Postgraduate or Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) obtained in the UK or Ireland.
- Ulster University PGC Further Education – PgCert.

A PGCE (FE) gained elsewhere in the UK is not currently recognised by FE colleges in Northern Ireland.

Qualifying while in service

Alternatively, you can take an 'in-service' qualification – PGCE (FE). If you meet the minimum subject and experience requirements, you can be appointed by a further education college on the understanding that you complete the PGCE (FE) teaching qualification (part time) within three years of appointment. The minimum requirements are:

- either a university degree obtained in the UK or the Republic of Ireland (or one deemed by the department to be equivalent to this).
- or a qualification in the specialist area in which you wish to teach, with at least three years' relevant industrial, professional or business experience.

- GCSE English (grade A-C)/Essential Skills Level 2 (or higher) in communication.
- GCSE maths (grade A-C)/Essential Skills Level 2 (or higher) in numeracy, or NICATS Access maths modules.

When you have passed the PGCE (FE) you can apply for registration with the [General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland](#).

Colleges occasionally appoint part-time hourly paid lecturers, often for specialist courses of short duration. Currently, there is no requirement for those teaching less than eight hours per week to have gained, or be gaining, the PGCE (FE). Colleges in Northern Ireland often hold a 'register' of part-time hourly paid lecturers so it may be worth contacting the college directly to request your name is added to the register.

See the [Northern Ireland Department for the Economy](#) for more information on the qualifications required by further education colleges.

Sector requirements

Prospective lecturers who do not hold one of the qualifications listed above, may still be eligible to apply for a teaching post, provided they complete the in-service PGCE (Further Education) teaching qualification. Prospective lecturers with a B.Ed. or PGCE may be required to undertake further professional development.

Since August 2012, all new full-time, associate and part-time essential skills lecturers must hold a degree in the chosen subject specialism or a degree that forms a minimum of 50% of the subject studied. In addition, all new essential skills lecturers, who do not hold a teaching qualification that is recognised for teaching in the Northern Ireland FE sector (see above) must achieve Year 1 of the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (Further Education) (PGCE FE) within the first year of appointment. The second year must be successfully completed within the next two years.

Higher education lecturing and research

To become a university lecturer, you will normally need to study for masters or PhD qualifications in the area you want to teach. Lecturers for more specialised or vocational subjects can often enter with experience of that field, and a teaching qualification, rather than a PhD.

Some research students undertake part-time teaching responsibilities while still registered as students, which is a valuable way to build up teaching experience. In the early stages of a career, it may be very difficult to gain a permanent contract as an HE lecturer and many are on sessional and fixed-term contracts.

There are a range of websites to help you understand the competitive academic jobs market. We recommend you visit the [Vitae](#), [Jobs.ac.uk](#) and [Prospects](#) websites.

OU Associate Lecturer

Students on OU modules organise their own study time, which can be a difficult skill to master. As an Associate Lecturer you become the 'face' of the OU for a group of students whose learning you support. They make a vital contribution to the quality of teaching and learning and support students by:

- Teaching and assessment (online and for some modules by post).
- Individual contact by email, phone or post.
- Group tutorials and day schools (face-to-face or online).

To become an Associate Lecturer with the OU you will need to have a degree or a professional or vocational qualification in the subject area you wish to teach. Your academic specialism or professional experience must be complemented by a personal commitment to the education of adults, and an appreciation of the challenges for adult learners who are studying

at a distance. It is essential that Associate Lecturers understand and accept the diversity of OU students and their learning needs. In addition, many Associate Lecturers teach full or part-time at other education institutions.

Not all OU modules ask for previous teaching experience, so it is important that you read the person specification to find out if it is a requirement for the module(s) you apply to tutor. For more information see [Teaching with the OU](#).

You can register your interest in working for the OU by completing the [expression of interest form](#). Please note, that the expression of interest service does not form part of our formal recruitment process and that it is your responsibility to identify suitable vacancies.

You can also apply for other externally advertised [OU Jobs](#) including [residential school teaching posts](#).

5. Specialisms in teaching and other education-related careers

This section contains information on other areas of teaching such as alternative settings and broader roles in the education sector that you might want to consider. You should ensure that you carefully research how you can train for these and what the implications might be for planning your OU study.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) involves teaching English, either in the UK or overseas, to students whose first or main language is not English. TEFL teachers work in commercial language schools, primary and secondary schools, and in FE and in the community. There are also

opportunities in development organisations, government departments, volunteer organisations, multinational companies, and The British Council. Some may also teach in industry while others are self-employed. Students may be of all ages and levels, and in various class sizes, depending on where you teach. Classes are usually taught in English, even with beginners.

TEFL is increasingly a graduate role, and it is now more difficult for those with no formal qualifications to obtain posts, and almost impossible in the UK. If you have a good basic education and an excellent command of English, it is still sometimes possible to find work in the private sector abroad with no training or experience, but a degree is often required.

Many language schools in the UK and abroad offer training courses ranging from short introductions lasting a couple of days to intensive certificate courses lasting four to six weeks.

Deciding which course to take depends on whether you want a dedicated career in TEFL or if you want to use your qualification to gain experience and see the world. The two most commonly accepted courses are:

- [Trinity College London CertTESOL](#) (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages)
- [Cambridge CELTA](#) (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults).

There are lots of courses out there so make sure you're getting something that meets the international standards of **100 course hours and 6 hours of live practice teaching**. Be very wary of online only courses that do not offer this. It is worth noting that CertTESOL and CELTA are the only two TEFL qualifications that are listed by the British Council as an acceptable introductory teaching qualification that meets their standards and requirements.

Special education

Special educational needs and disability (SEND) education covers a wide range of additional support needs for learners. Two roles we frequently get asked to provide advice on entry requirements are Special Educational Needs (SEN) teacher and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO).

Further details on both roles are provided by the [TES Institute](#). Details for Northern Ireland specific information on SEN and Inclusion is provided by the [Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment](#) and the [Special Educational Needs and Disability Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016 \(SEND Act\)](#).

Special Educational Needs (SEN) Teacher

To become a special educational needs (SEN) teacher in a mainstream school, you must hold a recognised teacher training qualification. Many SEN teachers move into this area once they have been teaching for a few years and have gained experience.

Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)

A SENCO is responsible for the daily implementation of the SEN policy across mainstream schools. The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs gives guidance on the different levels of support required for learners. Training and CPD for the role are often delivered by the Education Authority or outside agencies. Depending on the size of a school, this may be a specialist role, or additional duties placed on a class teacher or senior member of staff.



Other education-related careers

The focus of this guide has been on mainstream teaching roles across a variety of age ranges, although we recognise the education sector is diverse. For this reason, you may want to explore teaching in alternative settings to mainstream education or even explore broader roles in the education sector. Community, environmental, health and heritage education are just a sample of the settings you could explore.

Many OU students also decide to develop their experience in the classroom through support roles such as [Teaching Assistants](#), before committing to initial teacher training. The [Education Alternatives publication](#) by AGCAS is also a recommended read to understand and explore your options further as well as our webinar on [Educational Alternatives to Teaching](#) (only available to OU students, please sign in to access these resources).

6. Resources and support for potential teachers with a disability

It is regrettable that individuals with disabilities are under-represented in the teaching profession, but this should not stop you from considering teaching. Many disabled students and graduates are able to work without the need for specific adjustments or support but for some students, additional support can help to enable access to work.

Your individual circumstances

We recommend that you read the appropriate guidance document available below and make informal enquiries as part of an information gathering exercise to find out how the disability guidance relates to you.

[Disability in Action](#) provides support to people with disabilities and their employers in workplaces across Northern Ireland.

[NI Direct](#) website also has useful information for people with disabilities.

[The Equality Act 2010](#) and [Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001](#) require teacher training providers to ensure they are not discriminating against applicants with disabilities or special educational needs (SEN). Applicants with disabilities are under no obligation to disclose these. The decision to disclose is a personal one, please refer to our downloadable guide for further advice:

- [Your Career Planning Guide \(Section 5: Equality and Diversity Issues\)](#)

You will also find some helpful information on the OU's [Disability support](#) webpages and two recordings:

- [The Access to Work programme \(webinar\)](#)
- [How to explain a disability with employers \(podcast\)](#)

Initial teacher education providers do have a responsibility to ensure that individuals have the health and physical capacity to teach and will not put children and young people at risk of harm. This means all successful applicants are likely to be asked to complete a fitness questionnaire prior to commencing teacher training.

Additional resources

- [Supporting Dyslexic Trainees and Teachers](#)
This guide from the University of Southampton explores strategies for dyslexic teachers and useful resources.
- [Disabled Teachers Network](#)
A US-based organisation but welcome educators with disabilities from any country. Resources include discussion forums and an E-newsletter.
- [The National Education Union](#)
Represent and support disabled teachers and holds an annual disabled teachers conference.
- [Get into Teaching](#)
Further advice and support if you are training to teach and have a disability.
- [Disability discrimination law in Northern Ireland](#)
This short guide provides some basic information on disability discrimination law.

7. Funding for teacher training

Funding for students from Northern Ireland is similar to that for students from England, although there are some small differences. See the [Student Finance NI](#) website for more information or call their helpline on 0300 100 0077.

The Education Authority (EA) will calculate how much support you can get when you apply. Contact details of the regional offices of the Education Authority are available using the [EA Finder](#) on the [Student Finance NI](#) website.

8. Frequently asked questions

This section provides basic advice on some of the frequently asked questions relating to teaching from OU students. However, we recognise each student's circumstances are different which is why there are times our general advice may be inaccurate and not apply, so always make sure you complete your own research.

Can I still teach with an Open degree?

There are many teachers with an Open degree, but it is important you have a good knowledge of the subject you will be teaching which also depends on the setting and age range. This means there will be different expectations between early years, primary, post-primary, FE and HE. Contact your preferred initial teacher education provider for specific advice.

How much of my degree needs to relate to the school curriculum?

This will depend on whether you are teaching primary or post primary, and you will need to consider the views of the providers you are applying to. For primary teaching, you should show a good understanding of curriculum. As a rule, at least half your degree should be in your chosen school subject for post-primary, although this can relate specifically to content and module choice rather than the title of your degree.

Is it possible to get on a teacher training course without the required GCSEs?

You will still need to demonstrate GCSE grade C/4 (or standard equivalent) in mathematics and English – and a science subject for primary education. Initial teacher training providers will make the final decision on whether you meet their conditions – if you don't, they may ask you to sit a GCSE equivalency test or offer other evidence to demonstrate your ability. GCSE equivalencies are required regardless of any higher qualification in a related subject.

Can I teach with a third class or ordinary degree?

Most initial teacher training providers will not consider applicants without at least a 2:2, so you are highly unlikely to be accepted if you have an ordinary degree (without honours) or a third-class honours degree. In this scenario, researching and contacting your preferred initial teacher education provider directly before applying is essential.

Are UK teaching qualifications valid abroad?

They may well have equivalence and currency, but this answer is completely dependent on the country, institution, curriculum and regulations. For these reasons we recommend that once qualified, if you subsequently decide to work overseas, that you independently research the requirements for the country you are interested in moving to and that you contact schools in the region. The TES Institute also has a useful article on this subject: [Which qualification do I need to teach abroad?](#)

Can I still teach with a criminal conviction?

There isn't a definitive yes or no answer to this, as it depends on what the conviction is. Teaching is exempt from the [Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974](#) and as a potential trainee teacher, you will be subject to enhanced checks by [AccessNI](#). This means you must disclose any convictions. Your

first step is to get advice based on your individual circumstances. We recommend contacting the national charity [Unlock](#) for further advice.

Is it possible to teach in primary schools if you have trained in post-primary (and vice versa?)

In theory it is possible with a teaching qualification to teach any age range (4-16) and subject, but schools are likely to make a judgement on your suitability based on your knowledge of the curriculum and content of your academic qualifications.

Appendix 1: OU contact information

For advice about choosing OU qualifications and modules visit [The Open University website](#) or call Student Recruitment.

Student Recruitment

The Open University PO Box 197
Milton Keynes
MK7 6BJ

Phone: +44 (0) 300 303 5303

Email via www.open.ac.uk/contact

For Welsh speakers

If you would prefer to discuss your study needs in Welsh, please contact The Open University in Wales, where we will be pleased to offer personal guidance as well as information about the services available. You may contact us by letter, phone or email, or you are welcome to visit us. We recommend that you make an appointment first to make sure an appropriate adviser will be available.

Although we are able to offer a range of services for Welsh speakers, our study materials and teaching are normally in English.

Phone: +44 (0) 29 2047 1170

Email: wales@open.ac.uk

I siaradwyr Cymraeg

Os yw hi'n well gennych drafod eich anghenion astudio yn Gymraeg mae croeso i chi gysylltu â'r Brifysgol Agored yng Nghymru yng Nghaerdydd lle byddwn

yn falch o roi cyfarwyddyd personol i chi yn ogystal â gwybodaeth am y gwasanaethau sydd ar gael. Gallwch gysylltu â ni drwy lythyr, galwad ffôn neu neges ebost, neu, os yw hi'n well gennych, mae croeso i chi ymweld â ni. Byddem yn argymhell i chi wneud apwyntiad gyntaf i sicrhau y bydd arbenigwr priodol ar gael.

Nodwch, os gwelwch yn dda, er ein bod yn gallu cynnig ystod o wasanaethau i siaradwyr Cymraeg, bod ein deunyddiau cwrs ac addysgu fel arfer yn Saesneg.

Rhif ffon: + 44 (0) 29 2047 1170

Ebost: wales@open.ac.uk

Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland

Enquiry and Advice Centre in Dublin

Tel: +353 (1) 678 5399 or

The Open University in Ireland

Tel: +44 (0)28 9032 3722.

Email: ireland@open.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Careers information

The Open University

For careers information and advice visit the OU's [Careers and Employability Services](#). This website also contains a number of case studies of current and former OU students who have gone into teaching. OU students can also access forums and webinars related to teaching and education. You will need your OU login details to view these.

For details of OU qualifications and modules, visit the [Open University prospectus](#).

Prospects

[Job sectors on Prospects](#) provide comprehensive guides to different career areas including teaching and education.

[Job profiles on Prospects](#) enable you to search for careers such as early years teacher, primary/secondary school teacher, further/higher education lecturer, English as a Foreign Language teacher or special educational needs teacher.

TARGETjobs

[TARGETjobs](#) provides detailed information and advice on routes to becoming a teacher, choosing and applying for a teacher training course and funding.

UCAS Teacher Training

For the BEd course at Stranmillis University College, **you will need to apply through the [UCAS Undergraduate scheme](#)**.

General Teaching Council

The [General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland](#) provides comprehensive information about teaching in Northern Ireland including regulations and professional competencies.

NI Curriculum

[Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment](#) provides information on the Northern Ireland curriculum.

Department of Education

[Department of Education](#) provide information on the various course options for initial teacher education.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)

[Council for Catholic Maintained Schools](#) is the largest employer of teachers in Northern Ireland and plays a central role in supporting teachers.

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)

[NICIE](#) promotes and supports this integration of education.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)

[Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta \(CnaG\)](#) is the representative body for Irish-medium Education.

