Teaching in Northern Ireland

Entry requirements

It is compulsory to have a recognised teacher training qualification in order to gain a permanent teaching post in primary or secondary schools in Northern Ireland. As in the rest of the UK, all candidates must, by law, satisfy ‘fitness to teach’ requirements and in Northern Ireland candidates must be checked by Access Northern Ireland before entering schools. This is similar to the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks in England and Wales.

In contrast with the rest of the UK, there are no shortage or priority subjects in Northern Ireland, and competition for teaching posts is extremely high.

Any teachers wishing to take up a post must have eligibility to teach and be registered with The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI). Students who have trained outside Northern Ireland need to apply to the GTCNI to have their qualifications approved before they can register.

Courses

Institutions offering Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) courses in Northern Ireland do not participate in the Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR) scheme. Applicants should contact institutions directly for application forms and course details. Closing dates for PGCE courses range from November 2012 to February 2013 for September 2013 entry - see course providers’ websites for specific details. Competition for places is high.

PGCE courses

- St Mary's University College, Queen's University Belfast: Irish-medium education (for teaching in Irish-speaking primary and secondary schools);
- Stranmillis University College, Queen's University Belfast: Early Years (3-8 years) and post-primary (11-19 years);
- Queen's University Belfast School of Education: secondary English, mathematics, computing/IT, science, modern languages, RE, sociology, politics, Irish-medium education, main subject with special needs education and inclusion;
- University of Ulster: primary and post-primary. For post-primary you will be asked to choose one main subject: art and design, English with drama and media studies, geography, history, home economics, music, PE, or technology and design;
- The Open University (OU) modular PCGE leads to Eligibility to Teach in Northern Ireland. The OU offers six PGCE subjects at secondary level: design and technology, geography, mathematics, modern foreign languages (French, German and Spanish), music, and science (biology, chemistry and physics). There are further part-time courses in design and technology, geography, mathematics, modern languages, music and science.
St Mary’s University College, Stranmillis University College and Queen’s University Belfast also offer four-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) courses in both primary and post-primary teaching.

**Irish-medium post-primary PGCE**

The University of Ulster and St Mary’s University College, Queen's University Belfast have formed a partnership to offer a one-year PGCE course to students interested in becoming teachers in Irish-medium secondary education.

**Teaching in further education (FE)**

The following qualifications are recognised for teaching in the Northern Ireland further education (FE) sector:

- BEd;
- PGCE;
- University of Ulster PGCE (Further Education);
- University of Ulster Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) in Education (with specialisms).

The PGCE (FE) is the mandatory qualification for all new-entrant, permanent, full-time and associate lecturers in Northern Ireland who are not qualified teachers. Year one of the PGCE (FE), known as the Certificate in Teaching (CIT), must be completed within the first year of teaching and be followed within the next two years by the successful completion of the second year of the PGCE.

The PGCE in further education is delivered by the University of Ulster and has been revised to meet the needs of the 14-19 agenda and facilitate the transfer of teachers’ skills across the post-primary education sector. The qualification is currently under review with a view to extending the PGCE (FE) to all FE lecturers. Please check the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland (DELNI) website for the latest information.

**Essential Skills lecturers**

As of 1 August 2012, all new Essential Skills lecturers must have a degree in their subject specialism. The Essential Skills subjects are literacy, numeracy and ICT. Those who do not hold a teaching qualification that is recognised for teaching in the Northern Ireland FE sector must achieve the CIT within the first year of appointment. The PGCE (FE) must be successfully completed within the next two years.

---

**Funding**

Funding for students from Northern Ireland is similar to that for students from England although there are some small differences. Please visit the Student Finance Northern Ireland website for more information. You can also call their helpline on 0845 600 0662.
Students should apply to the Education and Library Boards (ELB) Northern Ireland in the first instance.

Further details are available from the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland (DELNI).

---

**Curriculum**

Schools in Northern Ireland follow the Northern Ireland curriculum, which is similar in structure to the curriculum in England and Wales and split into:

- primary (Foundation Stage, Key Stages 1 and 2);
- post-primary or secondary (Key Stages 3 and 4);
- post-16 education.

However, the content reflects a greater emphasis on skills development, creativity and enterprise via a more minimalist statutory curriculum. An Entitlement Framework guarantees all pupils access to a minimum of 18 courses at Key Stage 4 and 21 courses at post-16, delivered through collaborative arrangements between schools. Further details can be found at the Department of Education for Northern Ireland - Curriculum and Learning.

The Department of Education recommends that schools determine transfer arrangements by community, geographical and family criteria. Many grammar schools have introduced their own admissions tests.

---

**Applying for jobs**

All newly qualified teachers (NQTs), also known as ‘beginning teachers’ in Northern Ireland, need to successfully complete a year’s induction. See the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) for more information.

Getting a permanent teaching position is proving very difficult for NQTs at the moment and as a result many are starting their teaching careers in temporary supply roles. Teachers wishing to do supply work in Northern Ireland need to be registered with the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR). Job shortages mean that many residents of Northern Ireland who wish to teach will choose to train and seek teaching positions in England.

**Vacancy sources**

Vacancies are usually advertised in the main daily papers, e.g. the Belfast Telegraph, The Irish News and the News Letter and also regional papers. Vacancies may also be advertised in educational journals.

Teachers are appointed by the body responsible for the management of the school in which the vacancy has arisen. Details of management committees which control the various types
of schools in Northern Ireland are available from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI).

Written by Christine Smith, University of Bedfordshire, August 2012

© Content copyright of or licensed to AGCAS (www.agcas.org.uk).

To view the terms and conditions for the material provided in this publication, please see: www.agcas.org.uk/disclaimer