

Case Study: A New Career in Teaching - Naomi

Not everyone enters the teaching profession straight from school. Some people have successful careers in other professions before deciding to train as a teacher.

Think about your school and the community around it. There will be talented, intelligent committed people who could become excellent teachers. Career changers are one of the biggest untapped recruitment sources in this country. Consider how your school could support someone to make the best transition into teaching possible.

At school, Naomi had always planned to train as either a nurse or a teacher. As a teenager, she completed a short placement in a school but at the time decided this was not for her. She trained as a nurse, and during her career completed a Specialist Nursing Degree in District Nursing. She dedicated 17 years to the nursing profession but increasingly felt that she wanted to re-consider a career in teaching. Other members of Naomi's family were teachers, and she enjoyed supporting them in their work when she was able to.

Whilst on maternity leave, Naomi made the decision to change career and investigate routes into teaching. She also took the opportunity to volunteer in a school to gain some first-hand experience.

Choosing a course

Initially, Naomi was unsure how to go about applying and the variety of options seemed confusing.

Naomi attended open days at different universities. She spoke to people in the teaching profession, including the Head Teacher of her children's school to identify the best route into teaching for her. Naomi realised that because she had a degree through her nursing career, she was eligible to apply for a one-year course. At the time, she felt she was unlikely to be accepted onto a salaried course and so opted for a university course with PGCE.

Benefits (and challenges) of training later in life

Naomi felt that undertaking teacher training as a mature student had specific benefits. She had to be very sure starting a training course was the right thing to do as there were other factors to consider, such as family and finance. In making the decision, she therefore felt a high level of commitment to completing the course to the highest possible standards.

As a mature trainee, Naomi had a great deal of life and work experience to bring, allowing her to see situations from different perspectives. Naomi found the most challenging aspect of the course was keeping up with the work requirements while continuing to meet the expectations of family life. Organisation was key.

Worries before making the change

Naomi said that her biggest concern about changing career, was that after completing the training, she wouldn't enjoy the job! She admitted that the first few weeks of her teaching career were very challenging. She worked long hours and was worried that she would not be able to maintain this and meet the demands of family life. Establishing an appropriate work/life balance was important. Naomi says that this is an on-going challenge but has improved significantly.

Finance as a mature student

Finance was a big consideration. Not only was Naomi giving up a salary, but she also had a student loan for the course fees and maintenance grant. She wasn't eligible for any benefits to help with nursery fees due to her husband's income. Naomi was fortunate that her husband and family were able to support, and she did take on some bank nursing work at weekends but admitted it wasn't easy.

However, Naomi did point out that this was for a finite period and that now in her 5th year of teaching, she earns more than she did after 17 years of nursing.

The best bits

Naomi loves seeing children enjoying their learning and developing their confidence. She enjoys the positive relationships she develops with pupils and watching their personalities grow. Most of all, Naomi loves those 'lightbulb' moments, when children understand a new concept or grasp a new skill!

Naomi loves her job and knows she made the right decision to change career. She acknowledges that there are challenges but feels that teaching provides her with a range of opportunities and support.

Advice for career changers

- Do your research!
- Volunteer and spend some time in a school so that you are clear about what the job involves.
- Ask questions. Where you don't understand something, seek clarification.
- Look at the different routes into teaching, so that you can make informed decisions about which route is most suitable. Don't be afraid to apply for different routes if you believe they will work for you and your circumstances.
- Be clear on how you will fund the time you are training.

Good News Stories – Craig

Craig, Head of Year and PE teacher at Bishop Walsh Catholic School in Sutton Coldfield, shares his journey and insights into what makes teaching a great job.

My journey into teaching is a story of career change, personal growth, and finding balance between professional and family life. Transitioning into teaching was a deliberate decision to align my skills, knowledge, and passions with a career that allowed me to make a meaningful impact on young people. Coming from a background in coaching, scouting, and performance analysis in football, I recognised that my strengths were well-suited to working in a secondary school environment.

During my training year with the Arthur Terry SCITT, I faced the additional challenge—and joy—of starting a young family. This period demanded dedication, resilience, and effective time management, but it also reinforced my belief that teaching was the right career for me. The training I received was exceptional, equipping me with the tools and confidence to succeed in the classroom from day one. It also allowed me to balance my passion for education with quality time for my growing family.

Since completing my training, my career has progressed quickly. My training year prepared me to excel as an Early Career Teacher, and by my ECT2 year, I had gained the skills, confidence, and experience to take on additional responsibilities. In September 2024, I was offered the position of Head of Year in a thriving school—an opportunity that was both a testament to my hard work and a reflection of the support and foundation provided during my training journey.

This story highlights not only the transformative power of teacher training but also the possibilities for career changers to bring their unique experiences into education. It's a journey that showcases the rewards of teaching—helping pupils succeed while achieving a fulfilling work-life balance. Teaching has allowed me to combine my love for working with young people with the ability to grow professionally and personally alongside my family.

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your journey to this point?

With a background in coaching, scouting, and performance analysis in football, my career has been shaped by two key passions: a love for sport and a dedication to working with young people. Transitioning into teaching physical education was a natural progression, and since making that decision, I haven't looked back.

In 2021, I took a significant step by enrolling in the Arthur Terry SCITT program. Prior to this, I had completed a BSc in Sport and Exercise Science and a master's degree in Sport and Exercise Science (Performance Analysis). The SCITT course exceeded my expectations, providing exceptional training in all aspects of teaching—from pedagogy to behaviour management.

My first teaching role was in a school with a challenging behavioural context. This experience was invaluable, allowing me to find my footing quickly and make a meaningful impact on the school and its pupils. I later transitioned to a position closer to home in a high-achieving school. Working in these contrasting environments deepened my understanding of education and gave me immense job satisfaction and professional growth in both settings. In September 2023, I joined my current school as an ECT2. Shortly after, an opportunity arose for a Head of Year position. While I had confidence in my abilities, I initially hesitated,

feeling that my experience might not yet measure up. Nevertheless, I applied, viewing it as a chance to gain interview and application experience. To my delight, I was offered the role and began my tenure as Head of Year alongside teaching physical education in September 2024.

This journey has been both rewarding and enriching, and I am excited to continue making a positive impact on the lives of young people.

What positive experiences have you had?

Working with young people is both a privilege and a profound responsibility, and it has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my career. The opportunity to inspire and shape the next generation is a truly unique position to hold. There is no greater feeling than seeing the impact of your work come to life—whether it's through a pupil overcoming challenges or achieving their goals.

One of the most fulfilling experiences has been supporting pupils who need additional help and watching them grow in confidence and ability. Whether it's guiding a pupil through a difficult time or helping them find a passion for physical education, seeing their development is incredibly gratifying. Similarly, witnessing students' reactions when they surpass their own expectations in their GCSEs or A-levels is a moment of pure joy, not just for them but for me as an educator.

Joining the teaching profession has also been a personal journey of growth and learning. From my initial training on the Arthur Terry SCITT program, where I gained invaluable skills in pedagogy and behaviour management, to stepping into roles of increasing responsibility, every stage has reinforced my passion for teaching. Working in contrasting schools—a behaviourally challenging environment and a high-achieving institution—has broadened my perspective and strengthened my ability to adapt and connect with pupils from diverse backgrounds. These experiences have not only shaped me as a teacher but also reaffirmed why teaching is such a rewarding career. It's about more than just imparting knowledge; it's about making a meaningful difference in the lives of young people and helping them realize their potential.

How has your journey benefitted you and given you opportunities?

My journey into teaching has been transformative, equipping me with both theoretical knowledge and practical experience that have shaped me into the educator I am today. While understanding the theory behind teaching is essential, the real learning begins when applying it in the classroom. By reflecting on the "why" behind my actions and ensuring that every decision in my lessons is meaningful for my pupils, I have developed a deeper understanding of pedagogy and its impact.

This reflective and intentional approach has allowed me to build a strong foundation in my teaching practice. My passion for continuous improvement and striving to be the best I can be has not only benefited my pupils but also opened doors for professional growth. Being able to confidently articulate my teaching methods, supported by both experience and educational theory, has set me apart. When you speak passionately and knowledgeably about why you do what you do, people take notice.

This was particularly evident when I joined my current school as an ECT2 in 2023. Within a year, an opportunity arose to apply for a Head of Year role. While I initially doubted my readiness due to limited experience, my demonstrated commitment to my craft, along with

my ability to connect theory with practice, positioned me as a strong candidate. I was honoured to be offered the position, beginning this new role in September 2024.

Through my journey, I have also had the privilege of working in two contrasting schools—a behaviourally challenging environment and an excelling institution. These experiences provided me with a broad perspective on education and the adaptability to thrive in diverse settings. They also enhanced my ability to address challenges confidently and build strong relationships with pupils and colleagues alike.

Ultimately, my journey has taught me the importance of passion, reflection, and perseverance. These qualities have not only enriched my teaching but have also created opportunities to grow professionally and take on leadership responsibilities earlier in my career than I ever anticipated.

What advice would you give to someone hoping to follow a similar path?

Embarking on a career in teaching is an incredibly rewarding journey, but it requires dedication, adaptability, and a willingness to continually grow:

1. Embrace Mistakes as Learning Opportunities:

Don't be afraid to make mistakes, especially during your training year. The classroom is a dynamic environment, and every experience—whether successful or not—offers valuable lessons. Be fearless in trying new techniques and approaches. Some will work brilliantly, others may not, but each will bring you closer to understanding what works best for you and your pupils.

2. Be Reflective and Flexible:

Reflect on your practice constantly. One strategy may resonate with one group of pupils and fall flat with another. Recognizing these differences and adjusting your approach is key to growth and success as a teacher.

3. Learn from Others:

Use your free periods to observe as many lessons as you can, across different subjects and year groups. Watching experienced teachers in action will provide insights into diverse teaching styles, classroom management techniques, and methods for engaging students. Don't hesitate to ask questions and seek advice—teaching is a collaborative profession, and there's always someone willing to help.

4. Reach Out for Support:

Teaching can be challenging at times, but you don't have to navigate it alone. If you encounter difficulties, whether with a particular pupil, lesson planning, or classroom management, reach out for support. From mentors to colleagues, there's a wealth of experience around you to draw from.

5. Commit to Lifelong Learning:

One of the most rewarding aspects of teaching is that you never stop learning. Every class, every pupil, and every school brings new experiences. By remaining open to learning from others and incorporating new ideas into your practice, you'll continue to evolve as an educator.

Reflecting on my own journey—from coaching, scouting, and performance analysis in football to completing my training through the Arthur Terry SCITT program and stepping into teaching roles—I've learned the importance of perseverance and adaptability. Experiencing contrasting school environments, both challenging and high-achieving, has

significantly shaped my approach to teaching and broadened my understanding of how to meet diverse pupil needs.

Teaching is not just a job; it's a vocation that allows you to inspire, guide, and support young people in reaching their potential. If you are passionate about making a difference, stay committed to your journey, and be open to the incredible opportunities it brings.

Good News Stories – Nicola

Nicola - Phonics and Early Reading Lead at Little Sutton Primary School – made the bold decision to take up teacher training at 45, after working in early year settings and training as a Teaching Assistant. Her story is a fantastic example of how engagement with teacher training can enable schools to recruit high-quality teachers and leaders from sometimes unexpected sources.

I came to teacher training later in life at the age of 45, having spent a number of years working part-time in early childcare settings as my family grew up. It was while completing my Teaching Assistant NPQ Level 3 at a local school that I was lucky enough to be placed in the class of an inspirational teacher who encouraged me to apply for teacher training. After quite a few years out of the formal workplace, I didn't have much confidence, but I decided to give it a go, not thinking I would pass the interview to get onto my local SCITT!

My placements at two wonderful primary schools were thoroughly enjoyable and I loved them both. Again, I was extremely fortunate to be placed with professional, dedicated and inspirational teachers who cemented my growing resolution that this new career path was the right one for me. I was successful in securing a teaching post at one of these schools and have subsequently taught in Year 3, Reception and Year 1.

After developing a passion for teaching phonics and early reading alongside a keen life-long interest in reading for pleasure, I became the Phonics and Early Reading Lead at the school. As a result of this role, I now also work as a Literacy Specialist for our English Hub, supporting other schools with their developing early reading practice and providing training for staff focused on identifying and meeting the needs of children with SEND to reach their potential.

Positive experiences and benefits

- Development of professional relationships and working as part of a dedicated, enthusiastic team both within the school and the English Hub – we really do feel like a big, extended family!
- Excellent professional development opportunities at school, local and national level due to my role and involvement with the English Hub.
- The opportunity to be involved in action-based research that shapes national and regional educational strategies as well as being involved in the Arthur Terry SCITT.
- The ability to network with other educators in local schools and learn from them to improve my own practice.
- The knowledge that my work contributes towards setting up children to become life-long learners, able to access and enjoy the full curriculum offer, not only in my own school but across the region.
- Celebrating the joy that small achievements can make in a child's life – teaching early reading really is rewarding and a privilege. The same can also be said for parents who speak English as an additional language, many of whom are learning to read English at the same time as their children.

- Time flies by – no two days are the same and you are always on your toes.

Advice for future teachers

Work hard and be passionate. It rarely goes unnoticed.

Ask for advice if you are struggling or require support with something. You will have a wealth of experience at your fingertips in your school and someone will have encountered the same thing before.

Find out what really ignites your interest and passion. Is there a particular area you would like to focus on development wise? Seek out lead practitioners in your placement schools and explore the possibility of shadowing them. Use networking opportunities to build your expertise and connections. Volunteer for training opportunities and investigate CPD provided through national literacy organisations, many of which offer great online courses – some for free.

Build your knowledge and expertise of children's literature. There are a variety of great educational and publishing blogs and websites you can follow. Think about how you can develop reading for pleasure in your classroom.

Teaching is hard work. Look after your mental health and physical wellbeing, including prioritising sleep! Make time for friends and family – they are your biggest supporters.

Do not underestimate the impact that a fresh pair of eyes and your life experience (however old you are) can bring to the profession. Whatever your background, you will have something valuable to offer and the opportunity to pass on your own passions and knowledge to the next generation. Have confidence in your abilities.

If you feel that the setting is not right for you – you probably haven't found the right school. Do not give up! The right place and the right team are out there waiting for you.