

Edge Hill University

Interview Questions for
Primary
&
Early Years
Teachers

CC 11

Careers Centre

“Teachers should be passionate about what they do, ready to have a go at anything and prepared for the unexpected. Above all, teaching should be something by which the pupil and the teacher both come alive and enjoy what they are taking part in. Getting an interview is the first step in a lifelong journey. Prepare for your interview well, sell yourself and remember that you are about to change children’s lives!”

Miss Patricia Coulthard, Headteacher, SS Peter & Paul Catholic Primary School, Lancashire

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Written by Jacqui Howe
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(with thanks for specific contributions from Miss Patricia Coulthard,
Headteacher, SS Peter & Paul Catholic Primary School, Lancashire)

Preparation for Your Interview!

- Make sure you have a copy of your application form, letter, CV etc. remember that questions may be asked about what you have written – try and work out what might be asked and prepare your answer.
- If you had a person specification, interview questions will be based around this. Look at this – again you should be able to work out what kind of questions you will be asked.
- The same applies for job descriptions and school details. Issues and topics which are relevant to the job description and school ethos may form the basis of interview questions.
- Some schools are now asking interviewees to do a micro teaching session – you should get notice of this prior to interview.
- If you have visited a school prior to the interview make sure that you can comment on what you have thought about it and maybe select one thing that particularly impressed you.
- Make sure you are up to date with the latest developments in primary education – especially what has been on the news or in the latest issues of the TES.
- Take along examples of your work or a portfolio of your teaching practices. Offer this to the panel to view but don't take offence if they refuse to look at it. Some may have time and some may not. At least you are demonstrating your enthusiasm for the post by bringing along evidence of your work.
- First impressions are very important! Dress smartly – but comfortably! Smile, shake hands, and look enthusiastic. Don't be intimidated by five or six people on an interview panel. Often larger interview panels are not as rigorous in their questioning as two or three people can be.
- Have questions ready to ask towards the end of the interview, and no matter how painful you might have thought the interview experience was – make sure you thank the panel at the end of the interview.
- Always ask if it is possible to have feedback on your interview after the governors have made their decision. Even if you do not get this job --the feedback could make the difference for the next one!

GOOD LUCK!

**Jacqui Howe
October 2011**

Preparing your Portfolio

Advice from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers

Portfolios are gaining such importance now that it is becoming essential for applicants to keep one up-to-date as a professional demonstration of past work, skills and excellence. Just a few years ago portfolios were not really used very much, but this is rapidly changing and they've now become important accessories to applications, especially in the primary and special sectors.

There's no doubt that collecting together the best examples of your work gives a real boost to confidence levels. By highlighting your successes, you offer interviewers an extremely positive focus for questioning – as well as allowing your skills to speak for themselves!

The type of folder to use

The ideal size of your portfolio folder is A3, so that it's big enough to hold relatively large examples of pupils' work as well as other documents relating to planning. Make sure it looks presentable and is well labelled. Most good stationers and art suppliers stock selections of portfolio folders. Choose a folder without inner plastic pockets for ease of retrieval during the interview – the last thing you want is to be fumbling with stubborn pockets which are reluctant to relinquish their contents. Place the contents of your folder in the order you want to retrieve each item.

What to include in your portfolio

Jan Blakes and Brian Aikens, teachers from East Sussex, suggest including the following items in your portfolio:

- *A sample of your planning, both medium-term and short-term*
- *An example of your assessment of pupils' work*
- *Photographs of displays, special events such as class outings you have been involved in, or visiting speakers.*
- *Samples of pupils' work (particularly work that reflects the standards you value or your philosophy of teaching).*
- *Samples of your work and pupils' work that indicates your understanding of current education issues – perhaps some work on citizenship or the numeracy and literacy strategies.*

Unless you're applying for a job very early into your training, you'll have material you can include in a portfolio, but be selective. Although it's advisable to include items that reflect your excellence, it can also be positive to include something that demonstrates your ability to learn from your experiences, especially if you're a newly-qualified teacher. Many interviews include questions on how well candidates bounced back from classroom 'disasters', which reveal your skills as a reflective practitioner.

When preparing for an interview, take anything out of your portfolio that isn't pertinent to the job specification, so that you'll be able to make use of everything.

“Pool” Interviews

“Pool” interviews are normally held in the offices of the Local Authority concerned. They are usually short (20 to 30 minutes) and you can expect to be interviewed by a small panel of two or three people. The panel may well comprise a local Headteacher, an Inspector/Advisor and possibly a School Governor, etc. The result of the interview is usually given a few days later.

You cannot make your acceptance conditional on being allocated to a specific school or area. However, at the interview, especially in the case of very large authorities, you will often be asked in which areas or types of school you would prefer to work. See “Acceptance of Offers”.

More and more local authorities are now giving successful pool applicants a letter of intent, only issuing contracts when a candidate has been interviewed and accepted by a school.

Interviews for Specific Posts

These normally take place at the school concerned. They may last for half or a whole day and usually comprise :-

- **Informal** talks with a Key Stage Co-ordinator/Senior Teacher/Headteacher and perhaps other members of staff: This part of the procedure is extremely important as it can ultimately sway the balance for or against you, especially as the Head or Senior Teacher may take part in the subsequent panel interview. This can be a good time to ask questions about eg the School's Code of Discipline, parental involvement and how the school funds specific projects.
- **Teaching a Lesson/Providing a learning experience with a small group** - Increasingly candidates are being asked to give a short lesson, presentation or lecture, sometimes to a class or to staff (i.e. potential colleagues) or to the interviewing panel. You should be given prior warning if they are expecting you to do this and your preparation needs to be thorough. This will be a key part of the selection process and feedback from candidates has been very positive about this part of the selection procedure where NQTs can showcase their talents and skills in the classroom.

Take copies of your lesson plan for the interview panel and be prepared for questions about your aims and objectives, choice of teaching material, teaching and learning strategies employed etc.

- **Panel Interview** - Panel members are likely to be a combination of professional teaching staff and lay members and sometimes first time panellists who may be more nervous than the candidate! When asked a question by a particular panel member, mainly address your answer to that person – but do keep eye contact with the rest of the panel.

Remember that initial impact is all-important and that interviewers tend to form an overall impression at a very early stage, i.e. during the first few minutes. It helps to smile and, if you can, try to look relaxed and at ease. Remember that the interviewers themselves may be nervous and that they may also wish to make a good impression on the other members of the panel.

It is advisable to play safe and dress neatly and even conservatively, appear confident, avoid irritating physical mannerisms and verbal repetitions, and look at the panel. Don't talk too much, if you are afraid that you may be too long-winded you can always pause and ask "Do you require further details?" On the other hand do not simply answer 'Yes' or 'No'.

It is difficult to anticipate every kind of question that you will be asked, however you should be able to work out what most of the questions will be:

- Typical NQT interview questions – see examples in this guide
- Specific questions around the person specification, job description or other information you have about the post/school.
- Topical questions i.e. What has been in the TES/news about primary teaching?
- Research – what is the ethos of the school? What are the most important things that they are looking for in their teachers? What continually appears in school literature, website, mission statement etc as being important to the school?
- What questions would you like to ask the panel?

Most interviews will focus on your application and supporting statement including your course and teaching practice, previous work experience, interests, why you want or feel you are suited to this particular job in this particular school, what you feel you can contribute etc. This is why the work you did before completing the application form is so important since ultimately you will be able to put across your ideas, aims, motivations, interests and strengths with more honesty and conviction at the interview.

Don't be afraid to repeat information you put in your application, you cannot assume that all the panel have read it thoroughly, let alone will remember what you said in it.

The degree of specialist knowledge of what you are saying will inevitably be very varied around the interview table so beware of underestimating what they know and seeming to talk down to them.

Be prepared to be constructively critical of yourself and others; perceptive, balanced criticism of your training course and what you made of it is far more impressive than either excessive praise or blanket criticism.

Above all, when suffering from pre-interview nerves, try to relax and be yourself and remember that you are qualified to do the job or you would not be called for interview. Somebody has to be appointed – why not you?

If you have to prepare an interview lesson, here are some tips gleaned from a range of headteachers:

- Go equipped. Take your own resources. Photocopy plans and props just in case the school photocopier is on the blink.
- Check what information you will be given about the class prior to the lesson. Use this to inform your planning and teaching.
- Keep it simple but ensure you show differentiation in plans and tasks. Have an alternative activity up your sleeve in case what you've planned isn't working.
- Make it interactive – avoid lengthy monologues – pupils and staff will soon switch off. Keep the class involved with hands-on activities and open questions.
- Show enthusiasm. Be positive but avoid blanket praise – children know when they're being patronised.
- You are allowed to have a sense of humour; in fact, most schools would view this as a vital pre-requisite. Once your nerves settle, try to make it fun.
- Choose comfortable and appropriate clothes. A suit may look good at interview but is it practical in the classroom?
- Do address behaviour issues – have a number of strategies you can use and check school procedures.
- Practice makes perfect – rehearse your planned lesson, preferably with a colleague who is likely to give you constructive feedback. This is a good confidence builder.

Example Questions

The Course

Tell me about your degree/PGCE course.

When did you decide to apply for a place on a teacher training course and why?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of your course?

What parts of the course did you find most interesting and why?

Why did you choose this subject/these curriculum specialisms/age phase?

I was interested to read about your project on Tell me about it.

How have you developed in your subject (eg Early Years, PE, Maths) during your course?

Teaching Interests

Why did you choose to teach this particular age range?

Is education about passing examinations or giving an all round education?

(Argue the merits of each approach).

How would you use the locality of the school/organisation and its immediate environment?

How would you structure projects to give equal access to all pupils?

What are the important things to consider when setting up a classroom?

Having a scientific background, what importance do you place on Language and Reading?

As a subject co-ordinator, what would be your plan of action upon starting work?

Are you able to put this into effect immediately?

What do you feel are the important skills or qualities an (IT etc) co-ordinator should possess?

How would you help other staff members to overcome their difficulties/reluctance using computers in the classroom?

What are the uses and advantages of having a school environmental/nature study area?

How would you use outdoor provision to enhance children's learning?

Knowledge

Depending upon specialism:

What do you know about:

- The Early Years Framework?
- The new Early Years Foundation Stage?
- The Teaching of Early Reading?
- The role and development of Children's Centres?
- Multi-agency working?
- Every Child Matters Agenda?
- The Primary National Strategy?
- Excellence & Enjoyment and what would you do about this in your first year of teaching?
- What do you know about workforce remodelling?
- Do you agree with the findings of the 'Williams Report' that the teacher, even more than the parent, determines the learning outcomes in mathematics of pupils?

- What is your view of the 'Rose Report'

The School

What makes a successful school?

What importance do you attach to co-operation with colleagues, eg those teaching parallel classes?

How would you cope with lack of enthusiasm from colleagues?

What is your impression of the school/organisation? – be diplomatically honest. An honest yet balanced answer, stating the aspects of the school that impressed you and areas you feel need attention is better than blanket praise.

In what ways can parents/carers help in the school?

How would you involve parents in their child's education and life of the setting/school?

How do you feel about parent helpers in the classroom?

How would you work with a Teaching Assistant in your classroom?

Independent School

What can you offer to an Independent school?

Why would you choose to teach in an independent school as opposed to a state school?

What do you hope to gain from teaching in an Independent School?

Professional Issues

What are the main qualities of a good teacher?

What are your particular strengths as a teacher? How would you develop them further?

What are your weak areas and how are you overcoming them?

How much noise and moving around in the classroom do you permit?

How would you promote high standards of discipline in your classroom and encourage positive behaviour?

Which of your teaching practices was the most successful and why?

Tell us about your curriculum planning.

How would you develop children's communication, language and literacy skills?

Why do young children need role play?

How do you use malleable materials in promoting learning?

What are the benefits of a play based approach to learning?

Tell us about your experience of assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning

What are your views on assessment?

Describe the best lesson given by you on a Teaching Practice.

How would you ensure that you respond effectively to the different needs and abilities of individual pupils?

Do you differentiate between outcome or task?

How do you encourage students to work independently?

What are your feelings on sharing classes for specialist subjects – teaching your specialist subject to another class, whilst their teacher takes your class in one of your (perhaps) weaker subjects?

Regarding the extra time required by staff meetings, extra-curricular activities etc. do you anticipate any problems with time management?

How would you react if a senior member of staff queried or criticised some aspect of your teaching?

How do you take into account the background of your children e.g. social, linguistic, ethnicity, religious etc?

Pool Interviews

What type of school would you prefer to work in? Why?

What age group would you prefer? Why?

Are you applying to other Local Authorities?

Pastoral

How would you feel about taking on the responsibilities of being a form tutor?

How would you promote PSED/PSHE and citizenship?

How would you assess your ability to make relationships with children?

What is your experience of having parents in school? To what extent should this be developed?

What methods would you use to build up effective relationships with parents?

How would you seek to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the children in your care?

Can you give me an example of when you have challenged stereotypical views?

Safe-guarding children – what would you do if you had concerns about the personal safety of one of the children within your class?

Specific Questions for Trainees applying to Catholic/Religious Schools

How important is the home, school, parish partnership and how can a candidate work to maintain it?

Have you used 'Here I am' (Liverpool Archdiocesan RE Scheme) and what is your experience of working with it?

Are you a member of a religious denomination (*which*)? Would you take part in the religious life of the school?

Can you see any problems in teaching a faith that was not your own?

Career Development

How will you develop yourself as a professional teacher?

What are your plans for the future?

How would you like to see your career develop?

Are you prepared to go on courses?

How long do you expect to stay here?

Would you aim to widen your experience by seeking posts in other schools after a reasonable period here? (*You should commit yourself to at least two years providing of course that you and the school are satisfied with your progress*).

The Extras

What personal interests or hobbies do you have that could be of value to the school? (*Say what interests you have but it is unwise to commit yourself irrevocably until you have had time to see how you cope with the rest of your teaching load*).

Yourself

What is the relevance of your previous experience to teaching? (*Industrial experience, vacation work, bringing up a family*).

What are your interests outside college work and how involved are you?

What have been the major events in your life – both good and bad – and how have they affected you?

Personal Considerations

How easy will it be for you to get there?

Are you able to work in the evenings?

If we were to offer you this post are you in a position to accept it? (*If you **are** offered the job you will normally be expected to give an answer there and then and abide by it, so if you have other interviews arranged with schools you prefer you will have to think carefully about how to respond to this question*).

General Questions

How would you arrange your classroom?

How would you plan the day if given a fairly free hand by the Headteacher?

What is the place of topic work in school and what is your experience of it?

Which reading/mathematics schemes have you used, or have you worked out your own?

How would you display children's work?

How would you set about the teaching of reading to ensure a continuing improvement in standards?

What are your views on the balance between creativity and basic skills?

What are your views on school organisation, streaming, family grouping, team teaching, integrated day, open plan schools?

Why did you become a teacher?

What are your strengths/weaknesses?

Do you think the role of the PTA is important?

Give a specific example of creative curriculum that you have delivered

How have you met the different learning styles of the pupils in your classroom?

What provision would you make in regard to planning for Able, Gifted & Talented children in your class?

Your Own Questions

Interviews should be reciprocal affairs, providing you with the opportunity to learn more about the job, the working environment, colleagues etc. You will almost certainly be asked whether you have any questions towards the end of your interview. Only ask questions if you really want to know the answers, don't ask them solely to impress; however, they can indicate a genuine interest in the post, the school and the area.

Be aware of time constraints and do not ask too many questions. If you genuinely have no questions, reply "No, thank you, all the points I wished to raise have already been dealt with (either in the interview or earlier in the day)".

Of course you are not going to be asked all these questions and there are many others you may be asked but this gives you a flavour of the possibilities. Trying to think of persuasive answers on the spot can be difficult for some of these so some

time spent beforehand considering the likely questions and trying your answers out on a friend could probably prove a good exercise. And remember that whilst the content of your answers is very important so too is your body language and the clarity of your speech. Always sound positive, enthusiastic and make sure everyone can hear you! Maintain eye contact and avoid distracting mannerisms.

Salary

NQTs generally start their careers on the first point of the main pay scale known as M1. Those working in Inner London have a different version of the scale with higher rates because of the increased costs of living.

From September 1st 2011 an NQT on M1 will start on £21,588 per annum.
Inner London £27,000, Outer London £25,117

Further information can be found on the NASUWT website at :
<http://www.nasuwt.org.uk/PayPensionsandConditions/England/Pay/PayscalesinEngland/index.htm>

Acceptance of Offers

It is normal practice, within education, for applicants for a specific post to be asked to wait around after their interview for the panel to make their decision. The successful candidate is then called back into the room and offered the job and they are then expected to say whether or not they accept the offer.

If you find yourself in this situation it is of course possible for you to ask if you can let them know in a few days time, perhaps because you have another interview arranged and want to know the outcome. However, you must be prepared for the possibility that the school will not agree and will then offer the job to someone else.

Once again, as with the question of your starting salary, what you decide to do will depend on how strong a position you feel yourself to be in and how much you want that particular job.

It is also normal practice for Local Authorities to require applicants to confirm acceptance of an offer in writing. However, **even a verbal acceptance constitutes a contract and it is considered unprofessional behaviour to continue applying for other teaching posts.**

Advice from the NAS/UWT On Appointments & Interviews

(Taken from Finding Your First Teaching Post)

If you are offered the appointment verbally and you accept, this offer should be followed by a written confirmation of appointment, which, if you are to be given additional incremental credit, should confirm the salary point at which you will be appointed. Make your acceptance in writing.

If you have other job interviews in the pipeline, immediately inform the schools, withdrawing from the interviews, so that other candidates may be invited to replace you.

When confirming your acceptance of the post, ask the school for details of their induction programme if this has not already been sent to you. You should also make arrangements to obtain access to schemes of work, syllabus, etc., so that you may prepare during the Summer the work you wish to undertake at the beginning of the Autumn term.

Some schools may offer employment for the last weeks of the summer term.

Multiple Interviews

What if you are offered interviews for more than one post? It may be that the post that you really want is the interview that comes up last. Also, as you will be under less pressure than the other candidates at the first interview, being more concerned to get the second job than the first, you will be more relaxed and therefore more confident, likely to interview well and become the successful candidate.

Do you turn down the job offer in hand in order to attend the interview for your preferred job? If the second interview is close to the first, do you ask for time to consider the first job offer, in the hope that you will be successful at the second interview? Do you accept the first job, attend the interview for the second job and if successful there then withdraw from the first post?

This is an area where the Association is unable to offer advice. Interviewing panels are made up of individuals whose responses to circumstances the Association cannot predict.

- An interviewing panel may be understanding and would defer making an appointment until you have attended the second interview. However, your request would indicate that their school was your second choice and that is unlikely to endear you to your possible future employers.
- **If you accept the post and subsequently withdraw you are technically in breach of contract, for an acceptance, even a verbal acceptance is a contractual arrangement. The school may not only request the return of any expenses paid, it could also demand the costs of re-advertising and re-interviewing to fill the post.**

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