

**TEACHER SUPPLY IN BRITISH
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS**

CASE STUDIES

JUNE 2020



Rosie Twells

St Paul's School, Brazil

PROFILE

Following a PGCE at the University of Derby, Rosie taught in the UK for two years. She is now in her first year at a British international school in Brazil.

MOVING TO AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Rosie completed a PGCE at the University of Derby, involving placements in five different schools, and then went on to teach in one of those state schools for two years. She had always known that she wanted to teach, and in Year 10 when she and her peers were encouraged to do a work experience placement, she chose a placement in a primary school. She had also always been keen on travel. Although international opportunities weren't specifically mentioned during her training, she was aware of this possibility through speaking to other teachers.

There were a number of factors that influenced her decision to look at international school opportunities – the state of education in the UK, personal reasons, and wanting more of a challenge.

I thought it would be a good opportunity. In schools in the UK there is lots of pressure around monitoring, observations, workload. I know those are all buzzwords, but it influenced my decision. I wasn't thinking it would be any less in an international school, but I wanted to compare and have a new experience. I wanted more of a challenge.

She wasn't thinking about leaving the profession, but she points out that she was one of the youngest teachers at her school in the UK, and that some of those who had been in the profession longer seemed more disillusioned with the profession.

I think it is important to look forward rather than keep comparing to how things were in the past – think about what is going to drive us forward?

Rosie is now in her first year at a British international school in Brazil and is very positive about her international school experience.

I am loving it so far – the whole experience from the educational side of things to simply being abroad and living and working in a new country. All the opportunities are really positive.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Rosie has found the work/life balance at her international school to be much better than her experience in the UK, which also has a positive impact on teaching practice and pastoral care.

It is down to the way St Paul's is organised and the focus on managing teacher workload. I have more time out of the classroom – time to plan and prepare classes. This allows me to build better relationships with students, which leads to more conversations with them about academic or pastoral issues.

This improved balance allows time for teachers to think about their own teaching practice – to collaborate with others and reflect on what works and what doesn't.

Having more time affects the overall perspective of teachers. I'm more relaxed and happy to go into the classroom because I feel prepared.



RETURNING TO THE UK?

Rosie is hoping to stay in Brazil at least until the end of her two-year contract, and at this stage would be keen to extend the contract further – particularly if opportunities were to come up in middle or senior leadership. She is considering six to eight years in Brazil, and then possibly moving elsewhere.

She might consider returning to the UK at some point, but suggests some fundamental changes in the UK system would be needed to entice her back. She points to the class sizes in her international school which are a third smaller than UK classes. Larger class size in the UK has a knock-on effect for marketing and preparation.

You want to give quality, but there is no time, and the result is that you don't feel you're doing the best job that you can.

She would like to see the UK system adopt some of the strategies from the international sector – particularly around teacher welfare and workload, and consideration of what matters most in education.

Observations, data and assessment are obviously pivotal to teachers' day to day working, but pressure from Ofsted and others does place significant additional pressure on teachers in the UK which can become overwhelming.

If she were to return to the UK, her teaching practice and outlook would be influenced by her international experience. She points to having had access to a new culture and new way of life, as well as experience with new resources (including the school's use of remote learning and technology in response to Covid-19 school closures).

I also see how children here view their education and how they value it. This is part of the key ethos of the school, and feeds into my personal values as a teacher.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHER SUPPLY

Rosie suggests that teacher retention in the UK could be improved by looking at benefits and initiatives to support the workforce – both in terms of whole staff morale and one-to-one support for teachers. This could include additional training to meet the specific needs of individual teachers. This is the experience she has had in her international school.

You feel the school has invested in you and wants to support you.

Overall, Rosie would recommend international experience without hesitation to other teachers. And while she recognises that moving abroad is a big step, she thinks anyone can do it with the right planning and drive.

I know it has been the right decision for me. It has changed my perspective on teaching. I have the opportunity to reflect on my own practice and think about how to innovate. These are the reasons why I came into teaching.



Robert Notley

British School of Bucharest

PROFILE

Robert taught for 9 years in the UK state sector and is now in his first year teaching abroad in Romania. He is a PE Teacher and Head of Key Stage 5.

MOVING TO A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Robert taught for 9 years in the state sector in the UK, including in a large academy in London, but found that he was increasingly frustrated with the system in the UK.

I was fed up with how education was going. PE, for example, was constantly becoming less important and recognised in my school. I had to run a department with just 4 staff for 2,500 students.

The Government's involvement in education, and how they treated the sector, was also disheartening.

We were battered by them. Every time a new Secretary of State came in, something else landed on our plate. Just before I left, suddenly we became responsible for knife crime.

Robert had come to a point where he was considering leaving teaching.

I probably would have left the profession completely if I hadn't moved internationally. I'd been thinking about it for two or three years. I was fed up caring more about the kids than the kids themselves or the kids' parents.

Robert's partner was working at an international school in Jordan, and they took the joint decision to start looking at international jobs together. They now both teach at the British School of Bucharest, and Robert is much happier.

It's much, much better. I love it.

He has found his workload is reduced, and although the salary (with the current exchange rate) is not much more than in the UK, the cost of living is better. He finds the parents more supportive, and more willing to be involved in their children's education. He also finds the behaviour much better than his experience in the UK.

In the UK you aren't teaching, you're just keeping people under control. I used to dread walking into certain lessons. I don't dread lessons anymore.

RETURNING TO THE UK

Robert and his partner have discussed their long term plans, and think they may return to the UK in four or five years. They would like to start a family at some point, and as a same-sex couple they would not be able to adopt in Romania or many other countries. But he would consider returning to the international sector later on, and says that he is dreading a return to UK schools.

In the short term, he would also consider moving to an international school in another country. He loves his current school, but is keen to pursue a senior leadership role in the near future. He recognises, though, that he and his partner have different priorities for their next job.



We have different ideas of what we want. For him, it's about workload. For me, it's adventure.

Robert isn't unduly concerned about the logistics of getting a job in the UK after a period abroad.

Four or five years ago I would have said people from international schools would struggle to get a job in the UK. Some heads would write people off and assume you've been out of teaching. But I don't think that's so much the case now.

He gives examples of teachers from his previous school in the UK who had returned from teaching jobs in Egypt and Dubai.

Although Robert has only been in the international sector for a year, he is already aware of skills and experience that he would bring back with him to the UK.

While NQT salaries may be increasing, he feels that it won't be enough to retain teachers after the first two or three years. He also thinks all schools – both UK and international – should focus more on retention.

Schools should bend over backwards to keep their teachers.

My EAL knowledge and experience, more understanding of policies and parental engagement, knowing what works and what doesn't – being able to take more risks with my teaching. The actual pedagogy of my teaching is improved.

He has had a number of CPD opportunities in his first year in Bucharest, and is now also considering starting a Masters degree.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHER SUPPLY

Robert has clear ideas on addressing teacher supply for the UK sector.

They have to increase pay and decrease workload. That's the only thing that can happen.



Rachel Slater

Didcot Girls School, UK

PROFILE

Rachel completed her initial teacher training at Exeter University before moving to Oman to complete her NQT induction year at British School Muscat, where she taught for two years before returning to the UK. She is now a PE teacher (2nd in Department and Head of House) at Didcot Girls School – a comprehensive school in Oxfordshire.

Even though behaviour is phenomenal in my school, I deal with more out of the classroom issues. That is a definite difference from my international experience. More time is focused on supporting students than on teaching.

She also suggests that contrary to many people's perceptions, she often found the working hours in Muscat longer than her hours in the UK.

I would get in early to get planning done, then a whole day of teaching, then after school clubs, then fixtures. I was often working 12 to 13 hour days.

Notwithstanding her long hours, Rachel does still recommend international work to fellow teachers who ask her about her experience.

If you love your teaching and learning, then the international sector is 100% the right way to go. If you have a passion for the teaching side, it brings it out ten-fold.

MOVING TO A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Rachel had always liked travelling and had an interest in other countries, so when she finished her PGCE at Exeter University she applied to British School Muscat for a job which would allow her to complete her NQT induction. She was the first NQT at the school, and she was well-supported during the process of moving out and completing her formal induction year.

I really enjoyed my international experience as an NQT. There wasn't much behaviour management, so I could really focus on teaching and learning, and developing lessons to a good or outstanding quality.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

In her current job in the UK, Rachel feels that she doesn't focus as much on teaching and learning as she did when she was abroad.

RETURNING TO THE UK

After two years in Muscat, Rachel was ready to return to the UK. In part, she had commitments back home, but she was also interested in providing more pastoral support to young people which she felt there was less call for in her international school. She wanted to return to the state sector in the UK because she felt it was important to have a wide range of experience and perceptions. But despite having completed her NQT induction, plus gained an additional year of teaching experience, she found the process of securing a job back in the UK to be challenging.

It was a struggle. I applied for 22 jobs, and only got offered one interview.



Fortunately, that interview was successful and Rachel took on a maternity cover which became a permanent role with a promotion within six months of arriving. Rachel does believe the fact that she had been working internationally had an impact on the job application process. And the one school she asked about Skype interviews said they would need to see teachers in person.

My school was really supportive of staff having to travel back to the UK for interviews. But some schools are apprehensive about taking on someone who has been out of the English system. They want someone more local.

Her time working abroad has had a significant impact on her development as a teacher.

While working in the UK is the best fit for Rachel at the moment, she would not discount

My classroom-based practice improved 100%. I have no question that I am a good practitioner. I know how to set teaching and learning objectives and structure an effective lesson. My international experience gave me a solid foundation.

returning to the international sector at some point in the future.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHER SUPPLY

In Rachel's experience, the messaging about international schools which she heard during her teacher training was not entirely accurate.

When I was in training, all we ever had drilled into us was that you can't go international until you have NQT.

In truth, it is possible to complete your NQT induction at a number of accredited British schools overseas. Rachel feels that there are out of date myths around teaching internationally, and that more teachers could be attracted to the profession if some of the stigma or barriers (including the ability to complete NQT induction abroad) were broken down.

Rachel is hugely positive about the teaching profession, whether in the UK or internationally, but notes that it is certainly not an easy ride.

I'd tell anyone to go into it. I love what I do, and I don't think that will ever change. I wanted to be a teacher from the age of 13 – I always had a passion. It is so rewarding – as long as people are open minded and accept that every day is different, with different challenges. But the outcome of those challenges is feeling that you've done a good job and made a difference.



Ryan Sullivan
Doha College

PROFILE

Ryan is Head of Primary Music at Doha College in Qatar. He trained as a professional musician in the UK, and then moved into international education, working in Spain before moving to Qatar. He gained Qualified Teacher Status through the Assessment Only route while working at Doha College.

MOVING TO AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Ryan studied music performance (bassoon and voice) at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and was enjoying a successful career as a musician with freelance work and a number of high-profile performance awards. Alongside his musical work and training, he had also started taking on some teaching opportunities, including teaching English for the British Council in China and Thailand, as well as working as a facilitator for the National Youth Choir of Scotland. He found that he was getting as much satisfaction from the teaching as he was from his performing.

Ryan was planning to go to Mannheim to complete a Masters in music performance, but found himself wondering if this was the right path. He looked on Tes just to see what was available – who was looking for a music teacher and what did they want.

I was bold, applied to a few schools, and had three responses.

Ryan was offered a job at a tri-lingual school in Girona, Spain. They wanted someone who could teach Primary and Secondary music, with the youngest children taught in Spanish (which Ryan speaks), as well as providing supplementary English lessons.

I got on a plane to Barcelona and it was amazing.

Ryan loved his time at his first international school, but he felt that he needed to look at other opportunities in order to continue to develop as a teacher.

I realised I had good, raw natural talent as a teacher, but there were gaps in my teaching and learning. I had studied pedagogy from a musical perspective, but not from an education perspective.

Ryan moved to an IB school in Qatar, initially as a secondary music teacher, and was subsequently encouraged to take on a Head of Professional Development role. After only a year and half of full-time teaching, he was now in a whole school leadership role with responsibility for CPD.

When he was ready to move on, he saw that Doha College – a highly regarded school in Qatar – was advertising for a primary and secondary music teacher.

I thought they probably wouldn't entertain me. I was conscious that I didn't have a PGCE, and Doha College won't negotiate on that – rightly so.

But he applied anyway, and after an interview and lesson observation, he was contacted by the school.



I had a phone call from HR who said the leadership group would like to offer you the role, but we can't have one of our teachers without QTS, therefore we had to find a solution.

The proposed solution was that the school would support Ryan to complete his Assessment-Only QTS through Tes Institute. Ryan jumped at the chance. He started at the school in August 2018, and was very positive about the experience.

It was just brilliant – every day was so diverse.

He progressed quickly to Head of Primary Music, but is still also teaching Foundation Stage to Year 8, as well as supporting with GCSE and A Level performance, accompanying, and moderation of coursework. Not one to stand still, he has also now started a remote MBA with the University of Leicester.

INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING IN A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Ryan had significant teaching experience, in a variety of settings, by the time he embarked on a formal teaching qualification. He did not find the AO-QTS experience particularly onerous.

You have to have been teaching for a number of years in various contexts. You compile evidence that has to be measured against teaching standards. Some things I could have provided a book on, others I had to be more imaginative.

While for Ryan, this was largely a box-ticking exercise – collating evidence, being observed, observing – he does feel that it improved his understanding of some processes, such as lesson observation. And he found the final validation/assessment, from an experienced international school head, to be very thorough.

It was good confirmation that a lot will come naturally, and evolve the more you teach and you're in the profession.

Members of his school community, which is a COBIS Training School, are working as part of the Tes Advisory Board to continue to develop and hone the international ITT offer.

RETURNING TO THE UK

Although Ryan's teaching qualification would be recognised in the UK, he does not expect to teach in the UK, primarily because he values the cultural diversity of working abroad, which contrasts with the environment in which he grew up. From the point when he started doing some work in Asia with the British Council, he enjoyed the thrill of hearing different languages, of having to steer around the subtleties of different cultures and different nationalities.

I realise there are many schools in the UK that could have as diverse a student body, but in the Middle East that diversity permeates my personal and work life, and is as exciting to me as the teaching and learning.

Ryan would consider working in another country, but feels the choice of school would be more important to him than the country itself. And although the MBA and his experience will set him on a clear track to senior leadership, he is not currently interested in a job without regular contact with students.

Days when I'm really wired, I walk around to the KS1 play area and have a snack with them. 20 minutes and you're back to where you want to be.



ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHER SUPPLY

Ryan reflects on his own experience of completing a teaching qualification, and thinks that the more traditional PGCE approach may not be the best way to engage and inspire new teachers. He suggests training institutions could also do more to package up teaching qualifications with other qualifications or carve out clear, accessible pathways to teaching. He gives the example of students completing a BMus, many of whom are likely to go on to do at least some peripatetic music teaching with local authorities. He recommends a model where a teaching qualification can be embedded in a BMus, or at least providing a clearer pathway to qualified teacher from other degrees.

Ryan also talks about Doha College's developing Education & Innovation Forum, and the fact that the school is now providing opportunities for PGCE students to train within Doha College.

That's brilliant – PGCE students getting opportunities to work with some of the best practitioners in the business. You do your training in this amazing school, you will be well supported, great CPD opportunities, great colleagues.

But he is also mindful that new teachers could be disenchanted from the profession if the first school they go to as a newly qualified teacher, after their experience at Doha College, is not of the same high calibre.

Doha College were part of the first cohort of COBIS Training Schools, working alongside other top British international schools to contribute to the growth of the global teacher workforce.



Faye Stream

Rainbow International School
Uganda

PROFILE

Faye taught in the UK for two years and is now in her first international teaching role in Uganda where she is a primary class teacher and PSHE coordinator. She has previous experience as a TA and nursery experience both in the UK and abroad.

MOVING TO AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Faye completed a PGCE in the UK and taught for two years in the State sector before moving abroad. She had had a varied career before moving into teaching. She had worked as a TA and nursery assistant in a Special Needs school, and ten years ago she worked as a TA in an international school in China. But she had also worked in hospitality, having completed a degree in international hospitality management.

I always knew I wanted to go into teaching – from the time that I was a teaching assistant in Beijing. I made other choices along the way, but all the time, in the back of my head, I always knew I would teach.

Her diverse experience prepared her well for a career in teaching, and even before starting her teacher training she knew she wanted to work internationally.

Faye loved her teaching in the UK, but also has a great love of travelling, and felt teaching abroad would allow her to combine two of her greatest passions. Faye wasn't specifically looking for a job in Uganda – she had applied for a variety of roles, some of which she turned down, because she wanted to be sure she found the right fit. During her interview for the school in Uganda, she knew that this was the job she wanted.

I came out of the interview thinking I really want this job. It was to do with the school, and the panel – feeling that connection to them and to the ethos of the school.

Although some international school salaries are higher than in the UK, for Faye the decision was not based on salary.

I had a choice of choosing somewhere for pay, or for location. I chose the location. I've taken a pay cut to work here – I'm on half the salary I'd be on if I'd stayed in London. But there's more to it than money – I'm very happy here.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

In many ways, Faye finds her international experience quite similar to her teaching in the UK. Her school follows the English national curriculum, and her recent training experience from the UK allows her to share that expertise with her colleagues. But there are also differences – smaller class sizes, and guaranteed non-contact time because of the use of specialist teachers in the school.

It's nice having smaller class sizes. You can give more one-to-one attention to every child. Within a lesson I can speak to every child – ensure they have received some form of feedback. And although the workload is quite similar in terms of marking expectations and evidence assessment, there is less data entry than in the UK which frees you up to focus on the teaching.

But one of the biggest differences for Faye is the fact that her current school has fewer resources and less access to technology than her previous schools.

I'm adapting to that – this year is a big learning curve.



RETURNING TO THE UK?

Faye does not have any plans to return to the UK at this time.

That's more to do with me and what I want to do. I enjoy travelling and experiencing different cultures and places. Working in the international sector allows that.

She also comments on things like political issues in the UK, cost of living, work/life balance, and lifestyle as reasons for remaining in the international sector, along with the fact that it is easy to stay connected regardless of location.

The world is becoming a much smaller place. It's easier to travel. With Skype, WhatsApp, it's very different from 10 years ago when I was in Beijing. I felt more cut off and missed people more. There was more pull to return.

If she were to return to the UK, she would bring a range of useful experience, including dealing with different cultures and beliefs. She also points to the EAL skills she has developed, which she would be able to share with colleagues in the UK.

International schools prepare you beyond any training for supporting EAL learners. In the UK that's an area teachers can struggle with – in terms of accessing training and resources, especially with funding cuts in the UK. I would have that skill to pass on to colleagues – upskill from within.

Faye does believe that there could be barriers to returning to the UK, with some Heads dismissing international teachers as having been 'out of teaching'. But she also feels that international teachers need to market themselves and fight their corner.

Interview panels need to recognise that someone from an international teaching background has got skills they may not have in their current workforce. And teachers need to feel equipped and empowered to highlight the skills they can bring.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHER SUPPLY

Faye points to the financial considerations for teachers – both from a UK and international perspective – having a bearing on retention. Living in London, Faye found she couldn't afford to support herself on a teacher's salary (despite London weighting) and ended up moving back in with her parents. And the challenge is not just linked to salary, but also to school funding.

In the UK, because of funding problems, most teachers are buying supplies and resources for their classroom – choosing to take that out of their own pocket.

For Faye, this led her to think about moving abroad; for others this leads them to consider other professions.

Internationally – in some regions – the package can be a big pull for some teachers. But even in some international locations, where the salary is less competitive, schools may need to think carefully about how to attract and retain teachers.

It's naïve to pretend that the package and benefits isn't a consideration for candidates. I'm very happy. I love the school and love the experience. But thinking long term, I know my pay package isn't great. I have to consider forward planning – it is difficult to save for the future. There is always this little voice saying 'but what about when you retire?'



Helen Murray

Wickham Market Primary, UK

PROFILE

Helen completed her teacher training through the Graduate Teacher Programme and subsequently taught at an inner city school in Manchester before moving to the Middle East. After five years in Muscat, she is now back in the UK and is currently head of a school within the Avocet Academy Trust in Suffolk.

MOVING TO A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

After completing the Graduate Teacher Programme in Hampshire, Helen moved to Manchester to work at an inner city school. This was a struggling school with a high proportion of special needs and EAL pupils and a significant level of pupil premium. But for Helen, the challenges at the school were a godsend in terms of her own development.

I was in a challenging school, but had the opportunity to take a lot on – phonics training, early reading work with the Local Authority, etc. I was there for a couple of years, and really it developed my skills as a leader.

When Helen's (now) husband was offered a job in Muscat and they considered moving abroad, her first thought was absolute panic.

I had been put on a trajectory for fast track after only two years of teaching, and I thought I was giving it all up to go abroad.

Helen remembers her first experience of visiting the school in Muscat ahead of their relocation.

I thought I would just potter along, get a little job to fill the time, but I suddenly realised how incredible the school was.

The school was striving to be outstanding, and this experience was clearly going to raise the stakes in my teaching. The resources, training and number of experienced staff was a different level to what I had been used to.

Before moving abroad, Helen thought her career wouldn't progress in the international sector, but quickly realised that this was not the case. She joined the school as Maths lead and transferred to English lead after one year. She was in a management role, managing a team across the whole primary school (age 3-11), including highly experienced teachers.

It was a wake-up call that I needed to pull my socks up in my teaching before I could go on the fast track to leadership. I went to BSM and that's where I learned to be a really good teacher. I consolidated my experience by working with experienced teachers and being part of a year group team.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

For Helen, one of the biggest differences between her UK and international experience is linked to the financial position of the schools.

It is frustrating. Financially, there is a block on what you can do [in the UK]. You can't always realise your vision. Money is always at the forefront of your mind – we have such tight budgets.

Her current school site has incredible facilities, but the site is aging, and there are cost implications for the upkeep. She has found that she has to consider employing less experienced teachers at a lower salary point in order to offset the funds needed for essential maintenance of the school site. This, in turn, puts pressure on the rest of the team.

For Helen, one of the biggest impacts from her international experience is her increased expectations for what is possible in a school.



In Manchester, I had gained a huge amount of knowledge about special needs, EAL, pupil premium. What I hadn't encountered was how amazing some things could be – performances, assemblies, parental engagement days, international days. What my time abroad did for me as a Head was to set my standards and expectations for the school very high.

RETURNING TO THE UK

After five years in Muscat, Helen and her family moved back to the UK for her husband to take up a new job. Helen met with some resistance when looking for work from abroad, and reluctance from Heads to do remote interviews. She decided to wait until she was back in the UK to start looking for work. In the end, when she went to look around a school for her own children, she was offered a job on the spot. She worked there for 18 months, but was frustrated and felt that her skills and experience weren't being used to their full potential.

I had been managing a subject with oversight of 30 people, had been delivering training to 150 people, had been managing a significant budget. I had invaluable skills that could have been utilised. I felt totally frustrated, and realised that I was ready for a senior management position.

Helen worked as a freelance consultant in phonics and early years, and was then advised that she would be well suited to a role as an English lead across a trust. She managed to arrange a meeting with the CEO of an academy trust in the UK, told them about her time in Muscat, her frustration since returning, and her skills. It was a forward thinking trust and they could see the potential of having an experienced lead across a trust. Within a term Helen was working for Avocet Academy Trust, initially as English lead supporting four schools, moving quickly into an assistant principal role, and then into a Head of School role with one of the bigger schools within the trust. She has been with the academy trust for three years now.

Reflecting on her return to the UK, Helen thinks the UK schools sector could benefit from increased awareness of the high quality of experience many teachers gain from the international sector.

I think UK schools are missing a trick with international schools. They are developing really high quality teachers – consolidating their knowledge of teaching and accessing high quality training.

She points to the fact that the international sector is much more flexible and accommodating in terms of recruitment (including Skype interviews) to ensure they get the best possible candidates. But in her current role, she is able to bring her knowledge of the international sector to the recruitment process in her trust, helping to break down any perceptions about teachers who have worked abroad. She is also happy to recommend international experience to teachers considering their next move, and would consider a return to the international sector herself in the future.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHER SUPPLY

Concerns about teacher workload is a common theme in the UK. Helen suggests elements from her international experience can help address this.

What reduced teacher workload internationally was having specialist teachers on hand. Daily non-contact time away from children meant more time to digest, to research high quality lessons. Specialist teachers reduce workload because you're not teaching as many subjects. As a trust, we have tried to look at employing specialist teachers in some subjects such as PE and music but there is still a way to go with this.

She also points to disaggregated professional development days with two-hour twilight sessions, and strict policies on communications to support teacher wellbeing. But at the end, she comes back again to the funding of schools in the UK, and suggests that this is biggest challenge that needs to be addressed nationally.



Renata Alborough

British International School of
Kuala Lumpur

PROFILE

Following an undergraduate degree in French and Spanish at Exeter University, Renata did a PGCE at University of Bath. She taught for two years in the UK before moving to Kuala Lumpur for two years. She returned to teaching in the UK for four years, and is now back in Malaysia, where she teaches Spanish in the Secondary campus of the British International School of Kuala Lumpur.

MOVING TO AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Renata was in her second year of teaching in the UK when her husband, who was doing a masters degree, travelled to Malaysia for part of his research. He did some work with students from an international school, and came back impressed with the amazing opportunities afforded to those children. They started to consider the possibility of working abroad. International opportunities had not been promoted during Renata's teacher training, and she had not planned to work outside the UK.

It wasn't really on my radar. I was always thinking that I would get a job in the UK. I didn't actually know anyone who was working internationally.

Renata started looking for work in Malaysia.

At the time, it seemed really brave of us. We didn't know anyone in Malaysia. We just started looking and seeing what was out there.

They moved to KL and Renata taught in an international school, while her husband was doing charity work in his field (marine conservation). Part of the awareness-raising work he did involved running school trips. He decided that he would like to complete a PGCE, so although Renata was enjoying her work, after two years in KL they returned to the UK.

There is an increasingly wide range of options enabling people to complete teacher training qualifications in an international (e.g. iPGCE or Assessment Only QTS), but Renata and her husband felt this wasn't the right option for them.

He didn't really consider doing his PGCE in KL. We felt that going back would allow us to keep our options open as completing a PGCE in the UK is better regarded, and definitely preferred in UK schools. We also know that the top international schools require 2-3 years experience in a school in the UK, so he wanted to gain experience in the UK education system.

After four years in the UK, during which Renata was teaching in Devon, she and her husband are now back in KL, teaching at two different international schools.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Renata taught in both the state and independent sector in the UK, but her impression is that in the international sector there is more scope for creativity.

I feel more involved in shaping how things work in an international school. There is more independence, and you don't have to follow strict UK guidelines.

She also highlights the focus on innovation and technology, which she feels is always at the forefront in international schools. Renata feels her workload has reduced and she has a better work-life balance.

In the UK, I was teaching 33 lessons a week; here it is 22. There were also things like parents' evenings or open evenings in the UK. At BSKL we have a parents' day which is off timetable.



RETURNING TO THE UK

Renata has no immediate plans to return to the UK, but she and her husband have agreed that if their families needed them to be closer they might return. Her first experience of returning to the UK was very straightforward.

I was nervous initially about applying from abroad, and having to pay for flights for interviews. I wondered how many times I would be able to afford to fly back. But I was quite lucky – the one interview I went for, I got the job.

Renata had been warned that some schools would not value international experience, and might consider that she was out of date with developments in the UK from her time abroad.

It was actually a question at my interview, although it wasn't their view – what if someone was to say you'd had two gap years [while teaching abroad] – how would I react to that? I was very adamant that I had been teaching and working.

If Renata were to return to the UK for a second time, she would bring with her a wealth of useful experience and skills, some of which are specific to her role as a language teacher.

Being able to teach Spanish to a class of children where everybody's mother tongue is different has really helped me hone my skills.

She also feels that the international sector allows teachers more time to research, develop different activities, and practise different skills.

In the UK I felt I didn't have the time. I had ideas, and would learn new things, but I had no time to implement or practise. I have a bank of good strategies now that I've had time to research, to implement, and to tweak.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHER SUPPLY

Renata comments on teachers she has known who complete a PGCE, teach for two years, and then leave the profession. She suggests that in some cases, financial incentives could help retain teachers, but backed up by the resources and facilities to allow teachers to do their job properly – more teachers, smaller classes, more time to plan.

If the work environment isn't right, no amount of money would keep you in the job.

Renata is very positive about her time working in the international sector, and does think international experience can support teacher retention. She mentions friends in schools in the UK who are thinking about moving abroad because they feel the job in the UK is so tough.

It is a good option for teachers to come abroad to do the job that they have trained to do, and that they want to do, and that they can do well.



Ruth Unsworth

The British School in Tokyo

PROFILE

Ruth is currently Assistant Head Primary in Tokyo. In her career to date she has moved between international school jobs, and jobs in both the state and independent sector in the UK, as well as working as an educational consultant.

MOVING TO AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Ruth's first international job was in a school in Milan. After four years of teaching, she had become an education consultant in North Yorkshire. When the National Strategies funding was discontinued, and her Local Authority was restructuring, she decided to try something different.

I thought I'd go for an adventure. I'd heard about the international sector and the pedagogic freedom. In so many of the schools that I had been into as a consultant, they had lost the freedom. They were having to chase attainment and achievement targets and had to pigeon hole themselves into a certain style of teaching or pedagogy.

Although she came from a family of teachers, she had not really been aware of international opportunities earlier in her career.

It didn't occur to me that that was something I could do. I was on Tes and noticed the international tab, and thought let's just have a look. I saw a job in Italy, and it was in an area where I could do rock climbing, kayaking, skiing, and I thought I'd just see what happened.

Ruth joined the school in Milan as a Year 5 teacher and assistant Key Stage 2 lead, and loved it. After two years, her partner got a job in London and they returned to the UK. She worked for an independent girls school in London, and then moved to North Yorkshire to become co-head of a school in challenging circumstances.

The school was facing Ofsted, and someone I knew on the advisory team approached me and asked if I wanted a challenge.

This was a challenging role on many levels, which influenced Ruth's decision to return to the international sector.

It was the hardest thing I've ever done emotionally. There were safeguarding issues that you simply can't leave at work – it was emotionally draining. That's why I decided to return to the international sector.

She is now in her second year in Tokyo.

Although Ruth wasn't thinking about leaving the profession when she moved to the international sector, she had considered it earlier in her career, before moving into consultancy. She had been working in a difficult school, with 36 pupils in her class, most of whom had Individual Education Plans, and with parents who could be challenging, and at times threatening. She felt that the school didn't have the necessary systems and protocols to allow staff to feel supported, and this led her to look for different opportunities.



DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Ruth feels that the international sector offers more freedom to explore different pedagogies.

You can be more cutting edge; you can do things that aren't just tied to passing SATs.

She explains that BST has stopped using KS2 SATs, and instead has explored different routes and a wide range of data and tools to get better information about students, their needs, and their progress.

I don't feel that could have happened in some of the state schools I was working in. These were challenging schools, in designated areas of opportunities. People were coming in and telling you how to teach.

The pressures and stresses, for example around safeguarding, are still present in the international sector, but Ruth suggests the support networks are better in international schools.

The support network around each school has been brilliant. Because you're abroad together, and you don't speak the language when you arrive, you get more of a support network emotionally and with protocols of the schools.

Ruth doesn't feel that the difference is really linked to working hours, or stresses and strains of the profession, but around having the support and freedom to explore as a teacher.

Teaching is still very much a vocation. People want to be a teacher despite the wage – they have a passion to make a difference. But in the UK that can get squashed a little bit.

She feels there is more flexibility in the international sector.

We set high expectations and targets for the children, but we are able to explore different ways to get there.

RETURNING TO THE UK?

Ruth and her family are leaving Tokyo this summer to move to Europe in order to be closer to family and friends. She has been working, part time, towards a PhD, and may consider a job in academia, but would also consider working in a school. She suggests that proximity to family and friends is the main thing that would take them back to the UK. But while she would be happy to return to the UK state sector, she would be very selective about the school – mindful of choosing a school which would offer the pedagogical freedom and support that she has found internationally.

I would be very reticent to work in the type of schools I was working in before. I loved making a difference in those schools, but I've enjoyed now being able to explore as a professional. The tools that you have at your fingertips are remarkable. I couldn't do that before – couldn't be creative. And teachers are creative.

She had thought that by moving into the international sector she might lose touch with the UK, but she has found the opposite to be true. Working abroad, with her school's focus on evidence-based practice, she finds she is always looking at the latest thinking, research and developments – something which she feels she wouldn't have had the time or energy to pursue in the UK.

The international sector can provide teachers with a lot to take back into the UK – being more cutting edge with teaching and learning, experience of different strategies, thinking about how to structure the school day differently, and the ability to communicate with people from a wide range of different backgrounds.

In an international school you're working with people from all different nationalities. And they all have different experiences and expectations of what education should provide. Trying to meet those diverse needs, as well as providing the school's core education, opens up your viewpoint of what education should be.



ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHER SUPPLY

Although increased wages would be great, Ruth doesn't think this is the core of the challenge.

It is more about attracting people back into teaching as a vocation – as a profession.

While she accepts that teaching will never be fully autonomous, with schools tied to the Government and economic needs in any country, she does feel the profession will be more attractive if teachers are given the freedom to decide autonomously, as a profession, what is important.

We will still achieve the Government aims for a knowledge economy, but take away the high stakes of things like SATs so people can open up their own way of measuring. Developing children with the ability to think, and allowing schools not to be one size fits all. Give teachers the freedom to meet the needs of the children in their class.



Lucas Virgili

St Paul's School, Brazil

PROFILE

Lucas is a Brazilian national, teaching Mathematics, TOK, and Computer Science at St Paul's British School in Brazil. He trained in applied mathematics and advanced computing before completing a Brazilian teaching qualification. While based at St Paul's, he has completed an online PGCEi with University of Nottingham.

MOVING TO AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Lucas originally thought he would pursue a career teaching in the university sector. He did an undergraduate degree in applied mathematics, followed by a Masters in the UK in advanced computing before returning to Brazil to start a PhD.

During his doctoral studies, he had some opportunity to work with young people, and decided that school teaching might be the right choice for him, so he completed a Brazilian teacher training qualification. After teaching in Brazilian schools, Lucas started teaching at St Paul's British School in Sao Paulo via a third party, providing lessons in computer science for the IB programme. Then, four years ago, there was an opening at the school for a maths teacher.

INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING IN A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Although Lucas had completed local teacher training, he did not feel that it provided all the training he needed.

It wasn't great in terms of learning to teach, planning lessons, etc. I had to access other training. I used Future Learn and did a bunch of courses that helped.

In his second year at St Paul's, the school encouraged him to start an online PGCEi with University of Nottingham. Lucas found much of the content to be useful – providing him with a theoretical basis to back up his practical training and experience.

Most of the modules were useful in supporting me. I got to know theories that I didn't know, and there were useful references on assessment for learning, behaviour management, cognitive theory, etc.

Lucas' school has supported other teachers through an international PGCE as well. Asked if he would recommend the PGCEi, Lucas' response is positive.

Definitely. It was the only course I did that was fun and useful – including the PhD.

MOVING TO THE UK?

Lucas is complimentary about the British system, and prefers it to his experience of teaching in the local school system.

I like the British system better. The assessments are less focused on a single exam. The Brazilian system is very focused on the university admissions exam.

He also prefers the class sizes in the British system – most classes in Brazil will have 40 to 50 pupils.

Lucas and his wife have talked about the possibility of moving to the UK, but for the time being they are planning to stay where they are.

My sister lives in the UK, so it wouldn't be that problematic. But I don't like the cold.

He also thinks that the fact that he would need to obtain QTS, despite his existing qualifications and experience, would be a deterrent to moving to the UK.



If he were to move, he would bring with him a range of experience. In part, his English skills have improved since working in an international school, but he also highlights experience of dealing with different cultures and different priorities.

**ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF
TEACHER SUPPLY**

Thinking about recruitment to international sector, Lucas suggests that more could be done to motivate and attract more experienced teachers to apply. He also notes that current global uncertainties and anxieties (Brexit, Covid -19, etc.) are likely to have an impact on teachers leaving the UK.

For both the UK and international sectors, he also comments that making salaries more commensurate with the workload could help teacher supply.

For our workload, we don't get much money. It's a lot more work than a normal 9-5 job. But we want the best for the kids, so we work more.



Kathryn Brown

Rainbow International School
Uganda

PROFILE

Kathryn taught in the UK for 15 years before moving to Uganda. After more than 10 years in Uganda, she started teaching in a British international school. She taught for four years as a class teacher before moving into a Deputy Head role

MOVING TO A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Kathryn had been teaching in the UK state sector for 15 years when she and her husband decided to move to Uganda to run a project in a children's centre. They had young children at the time, and because they were living in a village, Kathryn home schooled the children.

We didn't want to send them to boarding school, and there was no British school anywhere near, so I home schooled them for ten years. It was handy I was a teacher.

The family later moved to the city in order to provide support for young people from the children's centre project who were taking up internships. This move to Kampala had the added advantage that her children could go to the international school. The two eldest children started at the school, and eventually a job came up at the school.

Kathryn knows that many people think of international teaching as a great way to see the world, but that wasn't her thinking.

I just fell into international teaching. I was very happy to go back into teaching – I just happened to be abroad.

But she says she has loved teaching internationally.

I came from the British state sector – lots of policing, paperwork, red tape – and I have loved it abroad – smaller class sizes, less government pressure. We can make decisions in school based on seeing how directives from the UK government have gone down, seeing what worked.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Kathryn is aware of the difference between her current experience working with privileged children, and her experience in the UK where her schools were in more diverse catchments. She also feels there is a greater appreciation of the value of education in her international context.

Education is highly prized by our parents – more so than in the UK – and that filters down to the children. There is more appreciation for education here. As a teacher, it is more fulfilling. You have more supportive parents, and children with a more positive view of education. It is empowering.

She points to smaller class sizes as another positive difference, but also suggests that technology may not be as progressive in regions such as hers.

RETURNING TO THE UK

Kathryn is planning to return to the UK at the end of this academic year – primarily for family reasons. Her eldest son is already in the UK and her daughter, currently doing A Levels, will be following shortly. Her husband has passed away, so it would just be her and her youngest child left in Uganda. All of their extended family are in the UK.



The project she and her husband moved out to start has also now largely been handed over to Ugandan staff, so she feels she has done what they came out to do. Kathryn is quite open minded about possible jobs back in the UK.

I'm happy to do class teaching or take on a pastoral role. I think there is much more wellbeing awareness, and related jobs, than there was when I was last in the UK 15-20 years ago.

She does have some anxiety about returning, and whether there are areas where she may have become deskilled. She points to the fact that her school uses specialist teachers for subjects like PE and Music which means she hasn't taught those subjects for years. Kathryn also thinks behaviour management could be more challenging on her return, as well as adjusting to the volume of directives from the Government.

Kathryn will bring a range of skills and experience from her international work to a new job in the UK including a broader world view and resourcefulness. She believes international experience can have a positive impact on teachers, and would particularly recommend it for those who might be thinking about leaving the profession, or feeling demoralised. She hopes that she might bring some of that enthusiasm and insight into her next school in the UK.

I think teaching internationally, if you're brave enough, can really bring back the love of why people went into teaching in the first place. I'd take some of that back – maybe be a bit of a staff motivator in the middle of all the paperwork, red tape, fatigue. I might have a deeper understanding of the beauty of teaching and why we all do it.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHER SUPPLY

Kathryn thinks the UK could learn from other countries that appear to have a greater appreciation for the importance of the teaching profession. She also points to teachers being given more professional freedom.

You need the leeway for teachers to say 'this really works' and not all be pushed through the same machine.

But she recognises this isn't a quick fix, and requires governmental support as well as bold headteachers with the freedom, flexibility and trust to make decisions for their schools.

I guess that would be my hope in the long run for UK education – that it could become a bit more fluid.



Rocio Marti

British School of Bucharest

PROFILE

Originally from Spain, Rocio has taught primary and secondary Spanish in Romania for 12 years. During her time in Bucharest, she has also completed a PGCE through the University of Sunderland.

MOVING TO AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Rocio completed a degree in pedagogy and a teaching qualification in Spain and taught in an international school in Spain before moving to Bucharest.

The job advert was for both Spanish and SEN. I thought it looked perfect. It was the job itself that got me to Romania.

INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING IN A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

A few years into her time at BSB, she decided to pursue a PGCE. She had been considering other work opportunities, but found that despite her qualifications and experience, without a recognised UK teaching qualification she wasn't getting responses to her applications.

She decided to do a distance learning PGCE with University of Sunderland, while being based in the school. The decision of which provider to use was made easier by the fact that her now husband, an engineer who retrained as a maths teacher while being based in an international school in Turkey, had also done the Sunderland qualification.

As an experienced teacher, Rocio felt that her PGCE experience was largely reinforcing what she had already been doing for many years. Her main motivation was to gain the qualification.

I did it for the paper. Of course I learned loads of things, but the teaching was teaching I was doing anyway.

She found it an added stress, completing the PGCE with its associated deadlines alongside her usual teaching job. But she does think it was worth it, and would recommend it to other teachers.

As a non-native English speaker, I've always had to prove myself a bit more. Now I have the qualification; I've studied exactly the same as other teachers. I would definitely recommend it.

MOVING TO THE UK

Rocio and her husband might consider teaching in another country, but for the time being are planning to stay in Romania. She thinks it is unlikely they would teach in the UK. If they moved to Scotland, where her husband is from, she is concerned that their international PGCEs would not be valid and they would need to complete further training. But the reluctance to move to the UK is also influenced by other teachers.

It's not my first choice for many reasons. Other teachers [who have come from the UK] say don't go. The main vibe is that classes are bigger, behaviour is appalling.



Rocio also has the impression that there are barriers for teachers with overseas experience wanting to move to the UK.

You hear constantly about headteachers who think that we're here on holiday. They don't trust what you've been doing for the past years.

She recalls colleagues who have struggled to secure the right job back in the UK, despite excellent experience.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHER SUPPLY

Rocio believes that people are born with a passion for teaching, but that it can be tricky to sell the profession to people. She points to behaviour and student/teacher ratio as the main challenges that need to be addressed.

If you can tackle that and you're really on the side of the teachers, then teachers will feel more supported.