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**by Colin Beveridge and
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Teachers' Skills Tests For Dummies®

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Contents at a Glance

Introduction.....	1
Part I: Getting Started with the Skills Tests.....	7
Chapter 1: Receiving Your Ticket to the Classroom.....	9
Chapter 2: Scoping out the Skills Tests	23
Chapter 3: Studying to Succeed.....	39
Part II: Literacy Skills	51
Chapter 4: Falling Under the Spell of Spelling.....	53
Chapter 5: Punching above Your Weight at Punctuation	75
Chapter 6: Getting to Grips with Grammar	103
Chapter 7: Considering the Comprehension Test.....	133
Part III: Numeracy Skills	157
Chapter 8: Making Sense of Mental Maths	159
Chapter 9: Stepping up to the Screen: Arithmetic Review	193
Chapter 10: Getting on Top of On-Screen Tests with Tables and Graphs.....	211
Chapter 11: Trying out Your Numeracy Skills: On-Screen Practice Questions.....	235
Part IV: Timed Practice Tests	275
Chapter 12: Practising Literacy Tests under Timed Conditions	277
Chapter 13: Tackling the Timed Numeracy Test.....	297
Part V: The Part of Tens.....	309
Chapter 14: Ten Top Tips for Keeping Your Head.....	311
Chapter 15: Ten Tricks for Acing Your Numeracy Test	319
Index.....	325

Table of Contents

.....

Introduction..... 1

About This Book	2
Foolish Assumptions	3
Icons Used in This Book.....	4
Beyond the Book.....	4
Where to go from Here.....	4

Part 1: Getting Started with the Skills Tests 7

Chapter 1: Receiving Your Ticket to the Classroom9

Tracing the Routes to Becoming a Teacher	10
Passing the early stations en route to Teaching	
Central	10
Pursuing an undergraduate degree.....	11
Taking a postgraduate path	12
Getting qualified: Teachers without QTS.....	18
Introducing the Professional Skills Tests	19
Taking the tests despite having the relevant GCSEs.....	20
Understanding why you have to do the tests	20

Chapter 2: Scoping out the Skills Tests23

Discovering the Test Basics	24
Arranging your test	24
Showing up (it's a good idea!).....	25
Taking the test	25
Limbering up for Your Literacy Test.....	26
Succeeding at the spelling section	28
Preparing for the punctuation section.....	29
Grappling with the grammar section	30
Understanding the comprehension section.....	31
Nailing down the Numeracy Test.....	32
Thinking about the mental arithmetic section	33
Managing maths questions on the screen.....	34

Chapter 3: Studying to Succeed 39

Setting Yourself up Physically.....	40
Compiling your tools of the trade	40
Creating a space of your own.....	41
Maintaining good notes	42
Preparing Yourself Mentally.....	42
Studying for a reason	43
Keeping your head on straight.....	43
Acing your Exam: Tips for Exam Technique	44
Revising for Success	46
Mastering maths	46
Limbering up at literacy.....	47
Playing games for revision	48
Shopping for exam success	49
Treating yourself for motivation.....	50

Part II: Literacy Skills..... 51**Chapter 4: Falling Under the Spell of Spelling. 53**

Breaking Words Up	54
Sounding off! Finding out about phonics.....	54
Making pronouncements on syllables	56
Getting to the roots	58
Looking at Patterns and Rules.....	61
Considering Other Spelling Approaches.....	63
Minding mnemonic strategies.....	63
Heeding homophones	64
Knuckling down to remember words.....	65
Having a Go: Practice Tests	65
Test A	66
Test B	66
Test C	67
Test D	67
Test E.....	68
Test F.....	68
Checking out the Practice Test Answers	69
Test A	69
Test B	70
Test C	71
Test D	72
Test E.....	72
Test F.....	73

Chapter 5: Punching above Your Weight at Punctuation 75

Discovering the Need for Pace	76
Looking at Beginnings: Capital Letters.....	77
Kicking off sentences.....	77
Starting proper nouns.....	77
Opening a sentence in speech marks.....	78
Pausing for Breath: Commas	78
Working with commas	79
Considering commas in subordinate clauses	80
Finishing off with Separators.....	81
Asking questions.....	81
Conveying emphasis	82
Speaking Up	82
Seeing precisely what's said: Speech marks	82
Indicating written quotes: Quotation marks	83
Pondering Other Punctuation Marks.....	83
Approaching apostrophes.....	83
Carrying out joined-up thinking: Hyphens	86
Perusing parentheses.....	86
Coping with colons.....	86
Summing up semi-colons.....	88
Having a Go: Practice Tests	89
Passage A.....	90
Passage B.....	90
Passage C.....	91
Passage D.....	91
Passage E.....	92
Passage F.....	93
Passage G.....	93
Checking out the Practice Test Answers	94
Passage A.....	95
Passage B.....	95
Passage C.....	96
Passage D.....	97
Passage E.....	98
Passage F.....	99
Passage G.....	100

Chapter 6: Getting to Grips with Grammar 103

Introducing Standard English.....	104
Meeting the Different Parts of Speech.....	105
Noticing nouns, proper nouns and pronouns.....	105
Visiting the venue of verbs.....	109

Messing with modifiers	115
Pondering prepositions	118
Considering conjunctions	118
Clawing at clauses	120
Fitting phrases into your writing	121
Working with Sentences	122
Viewing sentences by structure	122
Looking at sentences by purpose	124
Having a Go: Practice Tests	125
Test A	125
Test B	126
Checking out the Practice Test Answers	128
Test A	128
Test B	130

Chapter 7: Considering the Comprehension Test . . . 133

Meeting the Comprehension Test	133
Comprehending comprehension	134
Seeing how you make sense of writing	135
Following a process for tackling the test	137
Getting an idea of the passages	138
Examining the questions	139
Having a Go: Practice Tests	142
Test A	142
Test B	146
Checking out the Practice Test Answers	150
Test A	150
Test B	153

Part III: Numeracy Skills..... 157

Chapter 8: Making Sense of Mental Maths 159

Blitzing through the Basic Arithmetic Processes	160
Dealing with decimals	160
Dividing confidently	162
Multiplying longhand	167
Working with Parts of the Whole	168
Finding fractions of a number	168
Simplifying fractions	169
Performing perfectly with percentages	170
Fiddling with further fractions	172
Playing with proportion	172
Answering Real-life Maths Problems	173
Making sense of money	173
Taking care of time	175

Working with weight and volume	176
Converting distances	177
Covering rates and speed	178
Having a Go: Practice Tests	180
Test A	181
Test B	182
Test C	183
Test D	185
Test E	186
Checking out the Practice Test Answers	187
Test A	187
Test B	188
Test C	189
Test D	190
Test E	191

Chapter 9: Stepping up to the Screen:

Arithmetic Review 193

Playing with Parts of the Whole: Percentages	194
Juggling with the Table of Joy	195
Putting percentages in their place	196
Mastering Measures	199
Calculating complicated money sums	199
Tackling time	202
Working with weight, volume and distance	204
Reeling in the Ranges (and Averages)	204
Meeting the three averages	205
Spreading the news of ranges and quartiles	207
Tracking Trends	209
Carrying on extrapolating	209
Minding the gap: Interpolating	210

Chapter 10: Getting on Top of On-Screen Tests

with Tables and Graphs 211

Dealing with Data Tables	212
Reading about regular data tables	212
Doubling up with two-way tables	213
Meeting table-element criteria	214
Sussing out Simple Graphs	214
Battling it out with bar graphs	215
Lining up and shooting down line graphs	218
Pigging out on pie charts	221
Seeing through scatter graphs	222
Grafting Away at Complex Graphs	227
Getting the better of box-and-whiskers plots	228
Adding in cumulative frequency graphs	230



**Chapter 11: Trying out Your Numeracy Skills:
On-Screen Practice Questions.235**

Having a Go Yourself: The Tests	235
Test A	236
Test B	240
Test C	247
Test D	252
Test E.....	258
Checking How You Did: Test Answers	263
Test A	263
Test B	265
Test C	267
Test D	269
Test E.....	271

***Part IV: Timed Practice Tests* 275**

**Chapter 12: Practising Literacy Tests under
Timed Conditions277**

Putting Your Literacy Skills to the Test	277
Spelling questions.....	278
Punctuation questions	279
Grammar questions.....	279
Comprehension questions.....	282
Checking Your Answers	286
Spelling answers	286
Punctuation answers.....	287
Grammar answers.....	288
Comprehension answers	293

Chapter 13: Tackling the Timed Numeracy Test297

Practising Numeracy Questions.....	298
Mental arithmetic questions	298
On-screen questions.....	299
Checking Your Answers	304
Mental arithmetic answers.....	304
On-screen answers	305

Part V: The Part of Tens..... 309**Chapter 14: Ten Top Tips for Keeping Your Head . . . 311**

Breathing Well	311
Sitting up Straight	312
Talking Kindly To Yourself	313
Making Studying a Habit	313
Knowing What's Coming	314
Using a Last-Minute Cheat Sheet.....	314
Thinking Creatively.....	315
Keeping Your Notes Neat.....	316
Pressing the Reset Button.....	316
Focusing on the Result	317

**Chapter 15: Ten Tricks for Acing Your
Numeracy Test 319**

Reading the Exam Question Properly	319
Approaching a Question in a Different Way	320
Managing Your Time Effectively	320
Guessing Quickly When All Else Fails.....	321
Writing Down What's Important	321
Making Things Simple	321
Keeping on Track.....	322
Reading Your Answers Again	322
Laying Your Work Out Neatly.....	323
Doing the Most Obvious Thing	323

Index..... 325

Introduction

So, you want to become a teacher? Fantastic! Never mind the friends who wittily quote George Bernard Shaw's hilarious (not) 'He who can does. He who can't teaches'. Ignore the steady supply of family members who start presenting you with apples, wry smiles on their faces. Rise above the endless talk of a ridiculous amount of annual leave and the 'clever' comments about a well-paid job where you turn up at 9 a.m. and finish at 3 p.m.

You can pay no attention, because teaching is a great profession and being able to do it well is a real gift. To play a part in watching children and young people develop and learn is a privilege that few jobs provide.

Make no mistake – the work is challenging, uplifting, frustrating and exciting by turns. One day you feel on top of the world, the next you're tearing your hair out and wondering what on earth you've let yourself in for. But we can guarantee that it'll never be dull.

You spend hours marking work, planning lessons and developing the best ways to teach a topic, but when – and yes, this really does happen sometimes – you see your pupils' faces light up when a key concept finally clicks, it's worth every minute.

We know that you're going to make a great teacher – when you get past those pesky Skills Tests. And yes, we've heard all the standard arguments that you don't plan to be a Maths teacher or teach English and so why do you have to revise percentages and fractions or be able to distinguish your pronouns from your prepositions?

Well, here are several reasons:

- ✔ You'll be marking books, writing on the board, sending reports to parents, creating resources and doing plenty of other writing as a teacher. You want to look as professional as possible, and so having good English skills is essential.

- ✔ You'll be responsible for statistics about your classes, working out test percentages and – as you progress through your career – dealing with budgets, analysing data and discovering all manner of places where you need to be moderately sharp with your number skills.
- ✔ Students pick up attitudes from their teachers. Any outlook that 'numeracy and literacy aren't all that important' is going to rub off on your students. We think that they deserve better than that.
- ✔ If you don't pass the tests, you don't get into teacher training. No amount of grumbling is going to change that fact, and so you may as well put your energies into studying. (That's the 'it's in the exam!' reason; you'll probably tell pupils that quite frequently.)

We don't plan to turn you into a Maths geek or a literature professor – we couldn't if we tried; all we want to do is help you get through the tests and feel comfortable with the everyday English and Maths you need to be a good, professional teacher.

As you work through the book, you'll find that you get quicker and more accurate with your answers and will go into the test confident of getting the score you need.

Good luck! Let us know how you get on.

About This Book

This book is for you if you're planning to start teacher training and have to pass the Numeracy and Literacy Skills Tests to qualify for your course. We take you through the details of the tests, showing you how to revise in general and what you specifically need to know for these tests.

Andrew is your guide for the literacy side of things, taking you patiently through the tricks of spelling, punctuation and grammar. From him, you discover the following:

- ✔ Ways to make sense of the madness that is the English spelling system.
- ✔ How to use your existing knowledge of language and grammar to build new knowledge that you need for the Skills Tests.
- ✔ Language skills that benefit you for your career as a teacher and for life.

Colin is in charge of numeracy. In his chapters, he shows you:

- ✔ How to deal with the mental arithmetic test without dissolving into a panic.
- ✔ How to pull apart word problems and turn them into sums you can do.
- ✔ How to make sense of complicated graphs and get simple answers from them.

We also provide several sample exams you can use as part of your revision to see how you're getting on, and to give you a flavour of what the tests are like – and the whole book is full of worked examples so you can see both the answer and how to get there!

Foolish Assumptions

Making assumptions is always a risky business, but knowing where we're coming from may put you at ease. So, in writing this book, we assume the following:

- ✔ You know your basic arithmetic: how to add, subtract, divide and multiply small numbers.
- ✔ You're able to read and write in English at a basic level. It goes without saying, we hope, that all the rules, guidance and so on that we provide relate to Standard English. Nothing's wrong with colloquialisms and the like in everyday life, but they ain't gonna get ya no points in the Skills Tests.
- ✔ You want to do well in your Skills Tests as a step to becoming a great teacher!

Icons Used in This Book

Here are the icons we use to draw your attention to particularly noteworthy paragraphs.



Theories are fine and dandy, but anything marked with this icon tells you something practically useful to help you get to the right answer.



Paragraphs marked with this icon contain key points to take away from the book and the essence of each subject.



This icon highlights mistakes that can cost you marks or your sanity, or both! Others have made these errors so that you don't have to.



Beside this icon we provide useful exercises so that you can try out what you discover in a chapter. The more you practise, the easier the actual test is sure to be.



If you prefer you can safely skip anything marked with this icon without missing out on the main message. But you may find the information useful for a deeper understanding of the subject.

Beyond the Book

For a more realistic experience, visit www.dummies.com/go/teachersskillstests to access audio versions of the spelling and mental arithmetic questions, similar to those used for the actual tests. You can also check out this site for the latest updates on changes to the tests. Why not also visit www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/teachersskillstests for more quick and easy tips on how to brush up on your test-taking skills, giving you the confidence you need to sail through your Literacy and Numeracy tests.

Where to go from Here

Head to Chapter 2 for an explanation of what you're likely to find in your Literacy and Numeracy tests. If you're in a hurry to see where you are, you may want to jump straight to the

timed tests in Chapters 12 and 13. On the other hand, if you have plenty of time before the exam, you may prefer to start with Chapter 3 and set yourself up with a detailed study plan.

You can also use the index and Table of Contents to find the areas you want to study. This book is a reference – keep it with your study gear and turn to it whenever you have something you want to look up!

We wish you the very best in your Professional Skills Tests, and hope this book helps you to pass the exams in style! Good luck – both with the exams and with your career as a teacher.

Part I

Getting Started with the Skills Tests



For Dummies can help you get started with lots of subjects. Visit www.dummies.com to learn more and do more with *For Dummies*.

In this part . . .

- ✓ Learn to leap through the right hoops to become a teacher.
- ✓ Find out exactly what you need to know to sit and pass the Skills Tests.
- ✓ Sit down and study: perfect your revision technique and get mentally prepared.
- ✓ Keep yourself calm, stay motivated and succeed!

Chapter 1

Receiving Your Ticket to the Classroom

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ Exploring your options for training as a teacher
 - ▶ Understanding the need for the Skills Tests
-

Like just about anything worthwhile in life, becoming a teacher takes work and needs you to fulfil several requirements. One of these, whether you like it or not, is that you have to pass your Professional Skills Tests.

You may be a superb sports coach, a maestro in the music studio, an excellent exponent for English literature or a genius in the geography classroom. You may be able to inspire your pupils with enthusiasm for equilateral triangles, devotion to design technology or passion for the painting processes of Jackson Pollock. You may, in other words, be God's gift to the teaching profession, but without passing your Skills Tests you aren't going to reach even the first rung of the teaching ladder.

In this chapter, we lead you through a quick tour of the paths that you can take to become a teacher, providing information about what's required of you along the way. We also explain why you have to pass the Professional Skills Tests before you can enter a course of Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

Tracing the Routes to Becoming a Teacher

As the rather unpleasant saying goes, ‘there’s more than one way to skin a cat’. Likewise, you have more than one way into the teaching profession (and fortunately they’re all less messy and less damaging to the poor felines). Your task is to find the way that best suits you and your circumstances. If you’ve yet to make that decision, this section can help.

Passing the early stations en route to Teaching Central

No matter which route you take to becoming a teacher – and we outline plenty in this section – you encounter a number of common stops along the way:

- ✓ **GCSEs:** Having a Grade C or better at GCSE (or equivalent qualifications from other countries) in English and Maths has long been a pre-entry requirement for teacher-education courses.
- ✓ **Professional Skills Tests:** You’re reading this book, of course, because you need to pass the Literacy and Numeracy Skills Tests to be accepted onto a teacher-training course.
- ✓ **A degree:** To be a teacher, you require a university degree. You either need to hold a degree in advance of deciding that you want to become a teacher, or to earn one as part of your ITE.
- ✓ **Qualified Teacher Status (QTS):** To achieve QTS, you have to demonstrate to the university or school leading the training that you meet the Teaching Standards established by the Department of Education. At that point, the university or school recommends you for QTS to the Teaching Agency (TA), which is the body that awards the status (check out the Teaching Standards at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards>).



To look into all the available options for becoming a teacher in more detail than we have space for, visit the TA website at <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/teacher-training-options.aspx>



The information and guidance we provide in this chapter is solid. But your best course of action before making any decisions is to check with the universities and programmes that you're considering and make sure that you know the rules, regulations and requirements specific to them.

Pursuing an undergraduate degree

If you don't have a university degree and you want to train as a teacher, you can pursue a degree and work towards QTS (which we define in the preceding section) at the same time at university.



Two types of undergraduate qualification can lead to QTS:

- ✓ **Bachelor of Arts (BA)/Bachelor of Science (BSc) courses with QTS:** These courses provide an honours degree in a particular academic subject (such as English, Maths or Physical Education) alongside working towards QTS. Regular assessed school placements spread over the duration of the degree programme allow you to explore the *pedagogic* (that is, the theoretical and practical) approaches appropriate to the teaching of the academic subject in the school context.
- ✓ **Bachelor of Education (BEd) courses:** These programmes are honours courses in education. They're available for primary and secondary education, but given the usual requirement for secondary teachers to possess degree-level knowledge in a particular National Curriculum subject, BEd qualifications (which don't provide such a specialist focus) are much more common for primary education.

These two courses typically take three or four years to complete.

As with other undergraduate courses, you apply for entry to these programmes via the Universities and Colleges Applications Service (UCAS) at www.ucas.ac.uk.

Taking a postgraduate path

You have two options available if you have a degree in hand and decide that teaching is for you:

- ✓ **University-based training:** Led primarily by university and academic tutors.
- ✓ **School-based training:** Led primarily by a Training School.

These models involve a close partnership between universities and schools, because a balance of academic learning about education and pedagogy and practical application of these subjects through classroom experience is important. Teachers working in schools and university lecturers in education provide different but complementary perspectives on the work of the teacher.



Theory without practice can be abstract and unrealistic, and practice without understanding of the underpinning theory runs the danger of being simplistic and will not provide you with a detailed understanding of the complex processes at work in the classroom.

University-based routes

Postgraduate routes into teaching via a higher education institution (HEI) generally allow you to obtain a *Postgraduate Certificate in Education* (PGCE) with recommendation for QTS.



HEI-based PGCE routes are becoming increasingly rare because policy now favours school-based routes. As a result, numbers of training places allocated to universities for PGCE provision have been cut significantly. Check out the later 'School-based routes' section for the other ways of obtaining a PGCE.

A PGCE is an academic qualification that's often studied for and assessed alongside QTS. It allows students to explore philosophies and purposes of education, theories of how teachers teach and learners learn, the history of academic subjects and the ideas underpinning subject pedagogies.

PGCEs are awarded in two forms, though both require that you've already completed your first degree (usually in the subject you want to teach):

- ✓ **Professional level:** PGCEs at this level are assessed according to undergraduate criteria.
- ✓ **Masters level:** PGCEs at this level are assessed according to postgraduate criteria and carry Masters-level credits. These credits can be really useful if you want to go on to complete a full Masters in Education at a later date.



Check out carefully with your university whether the PGCE you're interested in carries Masters-level credits or not, because it can obviously have an impact on potential employers.



Strictly speaking, you don't *have* to have a PGCE; QTS is all that's required in order to work in schools in the UK. But many employers like to see that you also have the PGCE, which is seen as adding some academic rigour to the practicalities of QTS.

To gain access to most programmes you need a good honours degree (2:2 or higher), although the TA has sought to 'raise the bar'. In many cases a 2:1 or higher is now required, and in all subjects degree classification has a direct impact on levels of funding (see the nearby sidebar 'Show me the money!' for more on funding).

Also, with limited numbers of university-based PGCE places now available, admissions tutors can (and will) be much more selective. Entry criteria for PGCE programmes are, therefore, likely to become higher.

Show me the money!

The good news is that funding of up to £20,000 is currently available (depending upon subject and degree qualification) for a variety of university-based and school-based postgraduate routes into

teaching. For more information, take a look at <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/funding/postgraduate-funding>.



Overseas qualifications

If you qualified at an overseas university, you can still apply for any of the routes outlined here. Check out whether your degree and other entry qualifications (for example, GCSE English and Maths) are considered

equivalent by referring to UK NARIC, the national agency responsible for providing information and advice about how qualifications and skills from overseas compare to the UK's national qualification frameworks.



The TA claims that an A-level in the target subject plus any degree is enough to gain entry into a postgraduate programme, but the reality is that most HEIs have much higher benchmark entry criteria. So, if your dream is to become an English teacher but you have a first degree in Forensic Science, you're unlikely to gain a place.

PGCE programmes are available in full-time (FT) and part-time (PT) routes. FT routes take one year and PT routes up to two years. Please check carefully with individual HEIs, though, because not all HEIs are allowed to offer all subjects and only some subjects are available on a PT basis.



HEIs operate according to strict target numbers, and so early application for PGCE courses is advisable.

You have to apply for all PGCE courses via UCAS TT. See the website at <http://wwwucas.com/how-it-all-works/teacher-training> for further details about the application process.

School-based routes

As well as the university-based routes we outline in the preceding section, you also have a variety of school-based routes into the teaching profession.



School-based routes are open only to individuals who already hold a university degree.

School Direct

A new major route is School Direct (SD). Typically a one-year programme (though some schools may opt to offer part-time alternatives), SD exists for primary and secondary levels. The route is available to high-quality university graduates and leads to the award of QTS if you complete it successfully.

Training is led by a Training School, but a partner university is also involved in the programme. No fixed rules apply about how this arrangement must work in practice.

Some schools adopt a model in which, as a student, you're released for blocks of academic study at the partner university, where you prepare for a PGCE (we define the PGCE earlier in this chapter in 'University-based routes'). In other cases, the academic programme supplements the school-based one but doesn't lead to the award of a PGCE. Other schools develop bespoke relationships with universities in which teaching by university staff takes place in local clusters of schools or even in a single centre. Again, this arrangement may (or may not) lead to the award of a PGCE.



As you can see, a lot depends upon the nature of local partnership and assessment arrangements negotiated between the Training School and the partner university. The only way to be certain is to approach your chosen provider and ask!

School Direct exists in two versions:

- ✓ **SD Training:** see details above.
- ✓ **SD Salaried:** arrangements for application remain the same, but this route is normally open only to candidates who have three or more years' experience in work. Note, though, that this work can be in any field – it doesn't have to be in education. Successful applicants will receive a salary from their Training School – the clue's in the name! As with the SD route, places offered on this route also lead, if completed successfully, to the award of QTS and may carry the PGCE.



Funding of up to \$20,000 for the SD Training route is currently available depending upon subject and degree qualification. For information, check out <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/funding/postgraduate-funding>.

Application for School Direct places is also made via UCAS TT. For full details see <http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/teacher-training>.

School-centred Initial Teacher Training

School-centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) programmes are generally completed in a year (see <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/teacher-training-options/school-based-training/school-centred-training> for details). They lead to the award of the all-important QTS and some also to the PGCE.

As with the SD routes in the preceding section, SCITTs have to involve universities, but the relationship is somewhat different, because the route has to be validated by a partner university. So, although this route is primarily – as its name gives away – school-centred, the responsibility for assessment remains with the university.



The extent to which students following SCITT routes receive taught input from the validating university varies, and so check this aspect out carefully before you apply to make sure that the programme does what you want it to do.

Details of possible funding are available via the TA website (<http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/funding/postgraduate-funding>) and application for SCITTs is generally made via UCAS TT (see <http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/teacher-training>) – though look into this carefully, because it's not always the case.

Teach First

Teach First has a particular social and educational mission to work with schools operating in socially disadvantaged areas. As such, the schools it works with often provide very challenging (though potentially very rewarding) experiences.

To enter the Teach First school-based route into teaching, you need a minimum of a 2:1 degree or 300 UCAS points. (UCAS points are awarded for A-level grades and/or other post-age-16 qualifications.)