



<b>Profiles</b>	Teaching
<b>Name</b>	Kay Stephenson
<b>Age</b>	40
<b>Job</b>	Director of studies and head of science

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### Career path and qualifications so far

Having finished my BSc (Hons) Chemistry degree I went on to complete a PhD in Chemistry. Directly after my PhD I worked as an R&D (research and development) chemist in industry. After two years working in this area I decided to study for a PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) in Chemistry and Science and went on to work as a teacher of chemistry, head of chemistry, head of science and director of studies.

### Has anything you’ve done been especially useful in your career?

I’ve always tried to get involved in as wide a variety of activities as possible and feel that I’ve gained a little bit more knowledge and understanding of how people react, behave and learn from everything I’ve done. Helping to train apprentices during my time in industry was the first ‘trigger’ to make me think I’d enjoy teaching. Having a fantastic Head of science in my first teaching job gave me the confidence to go on to do my PGCE. I’ve been lucky to always work with very enthusiastic and professional people. I’ve learnt a lot from each of them. I’ve taught in a variety of schools, all of which have been mixed (girls and boys). I’ve worked in independent and comprehensive schools and have taught a range of class sizes from less than 20 to more than 30. Getting involved with the RSC, in particular the Committee for Schools and Colleges, has given me a broader view of science teaching and contributing to discussions is very satisfying. I especially enjoyed giving evidence to the House of Lords Science and Technology sub-committee concerning science teaching and science teachers. Being involved in sport for most of my life, mainly hockey, but also running, swimming, golf and football has been important. I’ve enjoyed being part of school and club teams, as well as being captain.

### What is a teacher?

A teacher is someone who has and who can generate enthusiasm for learning, whatever the subject. Someone who takes time to understand how to help each individual to achieve their best at whatever level. Someone who takes delight in the success each student achieves, without trying to claim that success as their own. A teacher is someone who never tires of learning.

### Day to day activities

Much of my time is spent preparing and planning lessons, teaching chemistry to students between the ages of 11 and 18 and marking and assessing students’ work. I also manage the science department in terms of teaching and learning, which involves monitoring the standards achieved by staff and students, as well as managing and supporting teachers and technicians. I’m responsible for academic matters across the whole school, which include teaching and learning standards, academic administration (and inevitably discipline) and liaising with all heads of departments.

### Further qualifications

As well as having a degree in Chemistry, I had to study for a PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education). This training takes a year (full time) and involves a great deal of time in the classroom. I was also awarded the Salters’ Prize for Chemistry Teaching in 1998.

### Why teaching?

I enjoyed being involved with the apprentices in industry and made enquiries about doing a teaching qualification. I was offered a teaching post out of the blue, accepted it and handed in my resignation a day later. I took a chance and haven't regretted it for one second – even at the end of the long winter term when sense of humour failure is a real risk.

### What do you most enjoy about your job?

It really is never the same two days in a row. I work with people and people are individuals so every day is unique. And no... I don't teach the same thing over and over. The day I use the same teaching notes for different groups will be the day to give it up.

### What other skills do you need?

Patience, tolerance, a sense of humour and a thick skin.

### Why is it useful to study a science subject at university?

Any really good teacher can probably teach any subject given enough training but you need to have 'gone through the mill' of trying to get a real understanding of scientific concepts if you are going to teach any science subject well and be able to explain scientific ideas clearly and with insight. It also helps to have a few anecdotes. I'm grateful that I wasn't a teacher for a while too, since having studied Chemistry I could have gone on to a career in just about any area – so valuable are the skills that one acquires through a Chemistry degree.

### Further information/contacts

The Training and Development Agency for Schools

Tel: 0845 6000 991 (teaching information line) or 0870 4960 123 (general enquiries)

[www.tda.co.uk](http://www.tda.co.uk)

### For further information on careers in the chemical sciences contact:

Education Department, Royal Society of Chemistry, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BA

Tel: 020 7440 3344 Email: [education@rsc.org](mailto:education@rsc.org)

[www.rsc.org/studentzone](http://www.rsc.org/studentzone) [www.rsc.org/chemsoc](http://www.rsc.org/chemsoc)

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