



Profiles	Education
Name	Vanessa Thompson
Age	32
Job	Chemistry teacher

Schools are really dynamic and exciting places to work as no two days are the same and you are faced with many challenges – not all academic!

Career path and qualifications so far

After gaining A Levels in Chemistry, Biology, Maths and General Studies, I went to Nottingham Trent University to complete a BSc in Combined Biology and Chemistry.

Whilst at university I spent time studying in France as an optional part of the course. This helped to improve my French and provided me with the opportunity to see environmental chemists at work in the Seaweed Institute, Brittany. Following this I worked on a funded summer placement at the Esbjerg Technical Institute in Denmark researching the use of a factory effluent as a fertilizer. This gave me the opportunity to live and work in Denmark and to experience the life of a research chemist.

After my degree I worked as a nanny in the USA but decided nannying wasn't for me so I returned to the UK. The following year I started a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) in Chemistry on a school centred programme awarded by the University of North London. This meant all my time was spent in schools, so it was very much training on the job. During my teacher training I worked at the local hospital radio station and for a council playscheme to gain additional experience. On completing my PGCE I accepted a job as a chemistry teacher at a school for 11 to 18 year olds.

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

The research work I did in Denmark has helped me to approach A Level project work logically and efficiently. It also provides me with a knowledgeable basis for career advice.

After I began teaching I attended a chemistry conference at the University of York, organised by the Salter's Institute (an organisation which plays a major role in the support of chemistry education) and aimed at teachers of A Level Chemistry. I found this a great opportunity to update my subject knowledge and learn about cutting edge areas of research and industry which I could then use to enliven my classroom teaching.

I also attended a spectroscopy workshop at the University of Reading which kept me up to date with the analytical apparatus I am teaching students about as part of the A Level Chemistry course.

What is a teacher?

A teacher is someone who has and can generate enthusiasm for learning. They need to take time to understand how to help each individual to achieve their best at whatever level. Also, they should never tire of learning as it is important that they keep up to date with any new developments in their field.

Day to day activities

As a secondary school chemistry teacher I teach science to students age 11-16 and Chemistry at AS and A2 Levels. I teach up to six different classes a day and have to organise practical activities and demonstrations for my classes. I also tutor a form group and am responsible for their general well being in school. Other activities can include: writing reports, organising extra-curricular activities, writing lesson plans, monitoring students' progress and attending courses to help me keep up to date with recent chemical developments and different teaching methods.

Does your job involve travel or activities outside the classroom?

Not usually. However, there are occasionally possibilities to take part in school trips and some of these can involve travel. Other 'out of classroom activities' include helping out with extra curricular clubs and attending parents' evenings.

Why did you choose your current job?

I was always fascinated by chemistry at university and felt I wanted to pass this enthusiasm and understanding on to others. From my experiences at school I know that a good teacher can make all the difference to your enjoyment of a subject and your likelihood to continue studying it.

What do you most enjoy about your job?

Inspiring young people and helping them to realise their full potential academically and socially. The moment when a student says "I get it!" is really rewarding. It's easy to know if you're doing your job well as the students provide you with constant feedback (for better or worse!). Also, schools are really dynamic and exciting places to work as no two days are the same and you are faced with many challenges – not all academic!

What skills do you need, other than your scientific knowledge?

Creativity, adaptability, patience and good communication skills are essential. A good knowledge of IT and maths would also be beneficial and a sense of humour definitely helps!

Have you got any advice for people wishing to enter your career area?

Attempt to work with children before embarking on a teaching career, as this is a good way to find out if it's for you and also gives you useful experience. You could try getting involved with your local council's after school schemes or volunteer at schools through an Undergraduate Ambassador scheme.

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

A science degree is essential to teach science, as you need a good working knowledge of the subject. It is important to be enthusiastic about what you teach. Since science is related to all other subjects and is constantly changing, it can be great fun to teach.

How do you hope your career path will progress?

I would like to eventually manage a successful science department where students have opportunities to realise their individual potentials and leave school with a good appreciation of science.

Examples of other career opportunities in this area

Other job opportunities in this area include: head of school science/chemistry department, deputy headteacher, headteacher, university lecturer, volunteer teacher (eg overseas), examiner, education officer (eg within a museum or professional body) and schools liaison officer (for example, working within industry or a university to help excite and educate school students about science).

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

Information on University Ambassador Schemes

www.rsc.org/Education/HEstudents/AmbassadorSchemes.asp

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

www.rsc.org www.rsc.org/chemsoc

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