



TEACHER SUPPLY IN BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

CASE STUDIES

JULY 2018



GARY HELLYER

BRITISH SCHOOL MUSCAT

Current Occupation: EYFS Teacher

International Experience: 3 years

UK Experience: 1 year (NQT)

Education: BSc Sports Development and Coaching; Primary PGCE with PE specialism

MOVING TO A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Gary had decided, during his NQT year, that he was going to leave the teaching profession. He was living with a friend from University who was working in a different field and was earning a similar salary to Gary's with a much lower workload. Gary wanted to complete his NQT year, but intended to leave teaching and look at jobs in Sports Development.

"I turned down a job at my [UK] school. I had told the Headteacher that I wanted to leave. She was pretty upset and said that I'd be wasted in any other profession."

From social media, Gary learned that a friend had got a job in Qatar as a Primary PE teacher, and he thought this could be an opportunity for him. He found a UK recruitment company [Harris Hill] that helped him explore international opportunities.

"They were brilliant – they were very positive about me as an individual. The school I was in was looking at becoming an Academy. The

school was lovely, the teachers were lovely, but it was a hard time to be a teacher in England."

Gary applied for a Primary PE job in Dubai, but the school wouldn't accept him with only one year of experience. In the end, although it was late in the usual school recruitment cycle (May), he was able to secure a job at British School Muscat when an unexpected vacancy arose.

"I didn't know much about the school, but at the time I needed a change. I knew that living abroad and working in an international school brings so many perks. I thought I've got nothing to lose."

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Gary was tentative about his international move initially, and was worried about going to such a big school after his experience, during his PGCE, of a placement in a four-form entry school in London.

"I have absolutely loved it. The quality of teaching is incredible. I have so much to learn – I have only been teaching for four years. But here, there is such an array of teachers from all over the world – experienced practitioners – to learn from. My goal every year is to end the year a better teacher than I started – it is easier to do that here."

Gary's background is different from many of his students (broken family; single mother with four children; attended a school with more than 50% of pupils on free school meals). He thinks it is important and valuable that he can help his students see that not everyone is as lucky as they are.

"The children are brilliant. And it is incredible to think that in 20 years time there will be children all over the world that you've taught."

There are other advantages to working internationally – the location is a travel hub (Gary has visited more than 10 different countries since taking the job in Muscat), the work-life balance is better, and there are financial benefits.



“Financially, it makes a lot more sense. Going home now, my partner and I can potentially buy a house. To save what I’ve saved out here would take twice as long in the UK. And the weather is a bonus!”

RETURNING TO THE UK

Gary has now handed in his notice, and is planning to return to the UK in September 2018. This is partly due to wanting to be closer to his partner and family, but also because he wants to work as a Primary PE teacher.

“I’ve done my three years abroad; I’m more accomplished as a teacher. This is a great opportunity to take what I’ve learned abroad and bring it to the UK.”

Gary doesn’t have a preference about whether his next job is in the State or Independent sector in the UK, but he says that before working internationally he would never have considered a job in an Independent school in the UK. But with his international experience, he is now open to working in either sector.

Gary is conscious that moving back to the UK will have challenges – and that his financial situation, as well as the schools and children he works with, will be very different.

“But it is another step in my career as a teacher.”

His biggest concern is the work-life balance, and he comments on the minimal pay rise for teachers in the UK in recent years.

“There are plenty of things I could dwell on, but I remain positive.”

Gary’s partner is also a teacher, and they have discussed the possibility of working abroad in the future. His experience in Oman has opened their eyes to the range of opportunities, and the experience and financial benefits of working internationally can be helpful for a young couple looking to establish themselves.

One of the challenges of planning to return to the UK is the interview process. Although many international schools will use Skype for interviews, UK schools generally expect candidates to attend

interviews in person.

“You can spend a fair amount of money going home for interviews.”

Gary thought he would work internationally for two years, or maybe even just one year. He was still not sure that he wanted to stay in the teaching profession.

“I love being around the children; it just fills you with such energy. I love the way children think. But it wasn’t a profession that was grasping me, or that I saw myself in long term.”

In the end, he stayed for three years, and admits that if he were single he would probably stay abroad for a few more years.

When asked what advantages he is bringing back to the UK after his time abroad, he points to the fact that he has worked in an outstanding school, with outstanding teachers.

“I have seen practice around me that you don’t get to see if you aren’t working in an outstanding school.”

He also points to the CPD he has been able to access, including the COBIS Programme for Middle Leaders, suggesting he wouldn’t have been given those opportunities at this stage of his career in the UK.

“I am coming back more motivated...If I had stayed in England I would have been happy staying at the same sort of level, with the same workload, but now I am inspired to do more, and start stepping up the ladder in teaching.”

“I never aspired to be a teacher – the opportunity just arose. With my background, teachers played a really big part as role models when I was growing up. I love to be able to give some of that back.”



CHRYSTA GARNETT
BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

Current Occupation: Head of School Partnerships

UK Experience: More than 15 years working in teaching and the education sector

International Experience: Five years, as Deputy Head and Headteacher at Taipei European School

MOVING TO A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Chrysta had worked in the UK for more than 15 years, and had worked her way up through the ranks in the usual way – Teacher, Head of Department, School Improvement Co-ordinator, Assistant Head. There were a number of factors that contributed to her decision to move abroad – a thirst for adventure, a milestone birthday for herself and her husband, an unexpected bereavement, and convenient timing in terms of her daughter’s education.

“We were reassessing what we were doing and why we were doing it.”

There was also an element of serendipity to the move – Chrysta was looking for Deputy Headships in the UK on TES, but had not set the parameters correctly, and got the international listings. The job in Taiwan came up first.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Chrysta points first to the similarities rather than the differences between her UK and overseas experience.

“I left Somerset and walked into a school on top of a mountain in a national park in Taiwan. But stepping into that environment, it was entirely familiar in some ways. GCSEs, British pastoral system, lots of British staff. It felt incredibly familiar.”

But the demographic of the parent and student population was very different from her UK experience. This was a fee-paying school; the families were incredibly aspirational, it was a very academically driven environment, set alongside an appreciation for and dedication to achievement in the arts.

“Stepping into the independent fee-paying sector which I had never experienced before brought with it a new set of demands and pressures.”

As a school leader, the Governance structure of the school – run by business people rather than educators – was also a significant difference.

RETURNING TO THE UK

After five years in Taiwan, Chrysta and her family decided to return to the UK. There were a number of factors involved – her parents were getting older and needed more support, her daughter was in Year 11 and needed to choose between A Levels back in England or IB in Taiwan, her husband wanted to look at more global work opportunities. She was ready for a change from the highly-pressured environment, and was looking for a new challenge.

She looked at other headships, both in the UK and internationally, but found that she wasn’t feeling a sense of excitement. As a Head, working internationally, Chrysta was given a lot of responsibility and had to be very self-sufficient. As a result, she felt her skillset developed quickly. After 20 years of working in schools, she was ready to explore roles other than headship. Stepping away from headship to her current role



has allowed her to use that skillset in a more varied way. And she has found her new role to be exciting and challenging.

Chrysta now works with more than 150 schools, including maintained schools and academies, with overarching responsibility for outcomes across the city from EYFS to KS 4. She oversees school improvement, school admissions planning, and line manages the traded education services (HR, Finance, IT).

Now back in the UK, Chrysta's time in Taiwan infuses her thinking about education in general.

“Children are children. It doesn't matter if they are from the most disadvantaged family, or the wealthy elite of Taipei. Children and learning and caring – these fundamental elements of education are transferable and trans-cultural.”

The stark contrast between the learning climate and aspiration around learning in Taiwan compared with what she had experienced in the UK has also made her think deeply about how the education system in the UK addresses social mobility.

Chrysta thinks international experience is hugely valuable for teachers, providing a more informed cultural understanding, and stretching teaching skills (for example around the need for differentiation for English language learners). She also mentions the excellent professional development opportunities available overseas, and the value of working as part of an international community.

“I learned a huge amount from my Canadian colleagues, Kiwi colleagues, French colleagues. They brought with them their knowledge of their own curricula and practices. It can only be a good thing to have a global perspective of learning and pedagogy.”



SARAH WINSLER

BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF KUALA LUMPUR

Current Occupation: Year 6 Class Teacher & Humanities Coordinator

UK Experience: Six years

International Experience: Three years

MOVING TO A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Having trained with Teach First, Sarah stayed in her first school for 6 years, and had a number of development opportunities. She gained experience in a range of roles: ICT coordinator, music coordinator, drama coordinator, phase leader, etc. She had always wanted to live abroad at some point, but from a personal perspective (family, relationships, etc.) it had never been quite the right time. She started thinking about international opportunities and decided to attend an international school teacher recruitment fair. Although she wasn't interested in applying for a job yet, she attended the presentations, and got to talk to teachers who were looking at international jobs. A number of schools at the fair invited her to interview, but she explained she wasn't really looking for a job at that stage. One school in Turkey invited her to come along and talk to them anyway. They answered her questions about working abroad and helped pave the way for her future move.

Although Sarah knew that she wanted to work abroad at some stage, she was not aware, during her training or first years of teaching, about the size and variety of the international schools' sector.

In the UK, the next step in Sarah's career was likely to be an Assistant Head role, but she was concerned that she was moving up the career ladder too quickly.

"I felt that I didn't have enough breadth of experience to do that role as well as I would want to. I wanted to have more experience in different year groups, more experience managing, before being able to look people in the eye and be their Assistant Head."

She felt it would be better for her career and long-term prospects to take a step back, evaluate, and clarify her interests and priorities. This led her to apply for and accept the job in Malaysia. At the point when she was applying for international school jobs she was not thinking about leaving the profession, although the thought had crossed her mind in the past, but she was looking for something that would allow a better work-life balance.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Sarah's current school is much larger (five-form entry) than her school in the UK, and she has had the opportunity to work with different year groups. Although the school follows the UK National Curriculum, she feels that she has more freedom in the classroom, without being tied down to the statutory systems and curriculum guidelines.

"My classroom is more my own."

Behaviour management also posed more of a challenge when she was in the UK, which has an inevitable effect on the quality of the lessons.

"In the UK, I felt most of my lessons revolved around crowd control. Here, I can be really creative with my teaching. There is the opportunity to take risks, to try things out."



The combination of tight finances, limited resources and more difficult behavior management meant that there wasn't scope for that sort of creativity, innovation and development when she was working in the UK.

RETURNING TO THE UK

After three years in Malaysia, Sarah is now preparing to leave at the end of the current academic year. On one hand, she would like to be closer to friends and family, but she also feels that it is time to leave the international sector in order to continue her own professional development. She entered the international sector to gain breadth, and feels that she has accomplished that in her time abroad. She loves the school, but with a well-established middle and senior management team at the school, there are not any obvious opportunities for career progression at the moment. She has applied for a Masters programme, but is also happy to explore other options (probably in education, but not necessarily in a school).

"I'm going to go back and see what happens... I have friends who have returned to the state system in the UK and found the transition quite difficult."

Sarah's teaching background was in the State sector, but she admits her perspective about independent schools has changed as a result of her time abroad.

"Working in the state system I didn't have time for anything else in my life; I would definitely consider an independent school – better work-life balance, and capacity to be creative. If I had more time it would enable me to do voluntary projects; social leadership projects."

One of the things that attracted Sarah to her current school was the fact that they offered one-year contracts. Moving abroad by herself, the short contract was appealing for a first international post. She quickly decided to stay for two years, and then three. There were professional development opportunities that she wanted to take advantage of, and she was also keen to see more of Asia.

"I do love it out here; I would stay for longer."

But she is also conscious that she wants to go back to the UK at some point, and is concerned that too many years outside the UK education sector would be a detriment to her career.

She expects to play a bit of catch-up when it comes to UK education policy and changes. She feels her international school is quite good at keeping abreast of relevant changes in the UK, but many of them are not pertinent.

Teachers returning to the UK bring with them a range of experiences and skills.

"I think the fact that you have moved abroad – independently and so far – shows you are willing to try new things; willing to take risks."

And she points to the way teachers working internationally need to adapt to new cultures, interact with lots of different people, and make relationships quickly. These are all positive, beneficial assets for the British education sector both at home and abroad.



JON DATTA
THE EDRON ACADEMY

Current Occupation: Deputy Head of Maths

UK Experience: Four years

International Experience: First year

MOVING TO A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Having trained with Teach First, Jon stayed in his first school – a secondary school in East London – for three years. He liked the school and was rapidly promoted. In his fourth year of teaching he was offered a Senior Leadership role in a North London school. He very quickly found that he was not enjoying the new role, and he and his girlfriend (also a teacher) started applying for international school jobs.

During his training, he had not been made aware of opportunities in British international schools. He had assumed international opportunities were mainly linked to TOEFL (he already had a CELTA qualification). During his time with Teach First, international opportunities had not been promoted.

“Schools in the UK struggle enough to recruit as it is; they are unlikely to promote international opportunities. And Teach First has ties to the Government.”

There were a number of factors that led Jon to

start considering British international schools. On one hand, he has always loved to travel, and had spent two summers in Central America. But he was also dissatisfied with his work-life balance.

“I was working 70-80 hours per week. I thought, do I really want to spend the next 50 years of my life working 80-hour weeks, never seeing my friends?”

He was, at certain points, considering leaving the profession. That was the point at which he started to become aware of other teachers talking about opportunities abroad.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

For Jon, his international experience is different in a lot of ways. He works fewer hours each week, and finds the setting much more relaxed. While he is good at managing his own workload, he can imagine that teachers who are used to working within a rigid structure with strict monitoring systems might find it alarming to have those systems taken away. But for him, this freedom is an advantage.

“I can take ownership of how I teach and the way that I teach without being bogged down in admin.”

Both Jon and his girlfriend essentially took demotions in order to move abroad, but it has given him the opportunity to learn how to manage the classroom in the way that he wants, and he has also gained experience of delivering the IB.

“The maths goes way out of the context of the classroom, looking at how it affects wider life outside of school.”

RETURNING TO THE UK

Jon finds it difficult to answer the question of how long he intends to stay in the international schools' sector.

“I’ve been much happier in my day to day life since I’ve moved to Mexico. For me, personally, I



would consider never going back to the English education system such as it is at the moment.”

But Jon’s girlfriend misses the proximity of friends and family, so they may return to the UK at some point, or look at British international schools in Europe in order to be closer to home. But he does have reservations about returning, expressing concerns about being constantly scrutinised and dealing with excessive administration. And he mentions the challenges of behaviour management from his previous schools.

“Here, the stress of lessons is taken away because I don’t need to spend 90% of my time in lesson on behaviour management.”

A return to the UK education system would be easier for Jon if there was more respect for, and value of, the teaching profession as a whole. He points to Scandinavia, with education systems where teaching is “put on a pedestal.”

“That is not how it is considered in the UK. Students don’t have respect for teachers – and that is because that respect is not there in the wider community. That lack of respect is reflected in all of the Government changes: under-inflation pay rises; having to work more for less money... That is why teachers are leaving in droves.”

Jon does say teachers thinking of moving abroad need to consider how easily they will adapt to different climates, the potential for natural disaster, etc.

“I had done a lot of travel in advance, but I can imagine it being a huge culture shock for teachers who haven’t had that sort of experience.”

Jon’s first term in Mexico was beset with the countries’ worst earthquakes in 85 years – parts of the school are still closed due to structural damage, and they are using temporary sites. And yet, he still claims to be happier than he was teaching in the UK.

“You just have to roll with it.”



AMY HYLAND
BRAEBURN SCHOOL

Current Occupation: Year 4 Teacher, Year Leader and PGCEi Mentor

International Experience: Three years

MOVING TO A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Amy moved into the British international school sector directly from a UK teaching degree, although she had never really intended to work in a British international school.

“It was never on my radar at all to come internationally.”

Towards the end of her degree, she was looking for jobs in Cumbria, but the local teaching website she had been using was not working, so she looked on TES and happened to come across a job listing in Kenya. She had been applying for jobs in the North of England, but found that they were few and far between, and there were large numbers of applicants for each post.

“I wasn’t enjoying my last placement and I was being turned off teaching.”

Amy had always wanted to be a teacher, but towards the end of the degree, when she was struggling to find a job, she found herself wondering what else she might do instead.

She had done a two-week placement at a local

school in Tanzania during her course, so she had some experience of international travel. But when she saw the job in Kenya advertised, she couldn’t really imagine herself living there, she did not expect to get the job, and had no intention of moving abroad. But it was late in the academic year, so she applied anyway.

“Three or four weeks later, there I was in Kenya.”

Amy is very positive about the three years she has spent in Kenya, pointing to the country’s diversity.

“Coming here has really opened my eyes. You look out the back windows of the school and see the slums; you look out the front windows and there are beautiful playing fields. It is really humbling.”

Working internationally has allowed her to develop and take on leadership roles at an earlier stage in her career than she might have done in the UK. But she is also enthusiastic about the rich experience of travelling in East Africa, and is sure that she makes better use of her half-term breaks than she would do if she were still in the UK.

“You live life to the full when you are away.”

RETURNING TO THE UK

Amy is not sure how long she will stay abroad. She is determined to return to the UK at some point, but she has just signed up for a fourth year at her current school. She is nervous about the reality of teaching in England though, partly due to a negative experience during her final teaching placement, and partly listening to what fellow teachers have to say about their experiences.

“My dream is to come back to the UK. I miss the UK. But I must say one of the drawbacks is going back to the British school system. From the experience of my last placement, and what people say, I think I have an irrational fear!”

But she is adamant that she will return to the UK at some point to teach. Her main motivation is to return home (she would consider a job in Europe to be closer to the UK if there wasn’t a suitable



job at home), and she would also like to complete her NQT induction. But she is concerned about the differences between the international and UK education sectors, and the work-life balance.

But she would bring back a range of experiences that would be beneficial to classrooms in the UK – related to diversity, acceptance, understanding. In her class alone there are 15 different nationalities. She has also had access to professional development related to EAL provision.

“The real life experience I can bring to my teaching – respecting diversity and acceptance for one another – that’s a big plus.”



STEPHANIE RAE

KENT COLLEGE DUBAI

Current Occupation: Year 4 Leader

UK Experience: Three years

International Experience: Two years

MOVING TO A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Stephanie is in her second year at Kent College Dubai, having previously taught in a small village school in Scotland for one year, followed by two years in a large school in Edinburgh. She had started considering international opportunities during her training in Aberdeen, citing things like lifestyle, opportunities for promotion, travel, and salary as possible advantages.

“But I also wanted to make sure I got a bit of grounding in Scotland before moving.”

Stephanie found teaching in Scotland quite difficult – particularly the two years she spent in Edinburgh. But although she was looking at international opportunities, she was not considering leaving the profession.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Stephanie is very positive about her time in Dubai.

“It has been amazing – I definitely think teaching out here is easier.”

She mentions the advantages of smaller class sizes, but also the opportunities for promotion and professional development within her school.

“Our school funds leadership courses and CPD courses – they are so active in helping staff develop. The school is willing to support staff financially to work towards promotion, and that has made all the difference.”

Stephanie’s school is linked to Kent College Canterbury in the UK, and that partnership is an important part of the school’s ethos. The links with the UK school, and the school’s British values, have made the transition to an international school easy for Stephanie, even though her training was originally in the Scottish curriculum rather than the English curriculum.

“At first I found it quite different to the Scottish curriculum – you have to rely on the team you’re working with to get to grips with it. But now that I’ve been here for a year and a half it is fine.”

Outside of the school, the work-life balance and social life is also a big part of the international school experience for Stephanie.

“You are here to work, and take on a job, but it is easier to be away from family because you are never bored – our school has a lot of young staff, and there is always something going on.”

RETURNING TO THE UK

Stephanie has no immediate plans to return to the UK. She is nearly at the end of her initial two-year contract, and has just signed a contract to stay for another year. But she says that she does not want to stay abroad for more than five years, mainly for family reasons.

“I do love it, but eventually I want to be closer to home and closer to family.”

If she does return, Stephanie thinks there will be a period of adjustment – adjusting to a different salary scale, larger class sizes, more behaviour challenges. But she would bring with her a wealth



of experience including professional development and leadership experience that would allow her to apply for more senior roles.

“I have had opportunities for leadership experience and promotion that I would eventually have had at home, but probably not as rapidly.”



POLLY HALL

BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF
WROCŁAW

Current Occupation: Year 1 Teacher

UK Experience: One year

International Experience: First year

MOVING TO A BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Polly trained as a secondary teacher in Nottingham, specialising in modern languages. During her first term of teaching, she quickly realised that it was not the right fit for her, and moved to supply teaching. She found that she was more interested in working in the primary phase, but having trained as a secondary school teacher she was concerned that she would struggle to get a job as a primary teacher.

“I was struggling – wondering who would hire me to teach Year 1 when I hadn’t trained as a primary teacher.”

She did know that international schools were an option, but assumed the opportunities were mainly further afield in Asia, Middle East, etc.

“I didn’t realise that there were quite a few places in Europe – that, actually, I could do it a bit closer to home.”

Coming from a language background, Polly had always wanted to live in other countries. When she realised that she could combine this with teaching, she decided to see what opportunities

were available, and secured her current job in Poland.

Before moving abroad, she had considered leaving the teaching profession.

“After that one term in a secondary school, I realised that secondary school teaching was not for me. I wondered if maybe teaching wasn’t for me – I wasn’t sure where I was going.”

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

For Polly, the biggest difference between her time in the UK and her time abroad is the profile of the schools. In the UK, she was working as a supply teacher in large schools, often in difficult areas. In her current school, the classes are smaller and manageable, the children are interested, and the senior leaders and colleagues are supportive.

“I have a lot of friends who are only a year or so into their teaching career and a lot of them are desperate to leave teaching or move abroad. I can tell them that, for me, moving to an international school was the best thing I could have done.”

RETURNING TO THE UK

Polly has not decided how long to stay in the international sector, but while she does not intend to return to the UK in the next few years, at some point she would like to live closer to her family. She is also aware that she may wish to complete her NQT year in the UK, although it is possible to do that in selected British International Schools.

But she feels that teachers who have worked internationally can return to the UK with useful skills – experience of teaching a high proportion of children with EAL, working with different nationalities and, on a personal level, overcoming difficult situations (such as moving to another country and being unable to speak the language). With her modern languages background, in addition to English Polly speaks French, Spanish and Russian.

“But I don’t speak Polish!”



TRAINING LOCAL TEACHERS

St Saviour’s School is a two-form entry school, and there is a mixture of British and Nigerian Staff (and a French national teaching French.) In each year group there is one expat UK qualified class teacher, and one Nigerian class teacher with a UK teaching qualification (as well as subject teachers). The school has made a tremendous investment in the development of Nigerian staff. They work in partnership with Sunderland University, and each year they put two Nigerian teachers through an international PGCE qualification.

“From our appraisal system, we identify our highest performing Nigerian members of staff. We then support them with the cost of the course to help them get a PGCE. The school’s vision is for all 40 members of staff to have UK qualifications.”

The school sponsors these teachers by covering course fees, but also other associated costs (buying a generator for their home, paying for internet, providing a laptop, etc.) The school is also now looking at the possibility of getting QTS for these trained teachers. In his time at the school, none of the Nigerian teachers they have trained have moved on to the UK, but with a PGCE and QTS, there is no reason why they couldn’t consider that in the future.

CURRENT RECRUITMENT CLIMATE

Craig says that it is, currently, hugely challenging to recruit staff. With the support of his Board, the school has a continuous recruitment policy. He is always recruiting, even attending recruitment fairs in years when he does not need to appoint anyone. And he uses a wide variety of recruitment tools – TES, Guardian, COBIS website, recruitment fairs, word of mouth.

“You have to be quite eclectic in your approach.”

He thinks that the volume and quality of candidates is decreasing. He can often go to a number of recruitment fairs and not appoint a single teacher.

START WITH WHY

There are three vacancies at his school for next academic year, and two of them have now been



CRAIG HEATON
ST SAVIOUR’S SCHOOL IKOYI

Current Occupation: Headteacher

International and UK Experience:

Headteacher at six schools in the UK, Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Egypt and Nigeria

DIFFICULT LOCATIONS

Craig has a great deal of experience recruiting teachers to difficult locations. He has been Head in a State school in a deprived location in the centre of Manchester; in Egypt during the Arab spring; and now in Lagos with negative worldwide perceptions about security, safety, Boko Haram, etc.

“The problem is that the schools in those locations can’t compromise on quality of teachers – they still have to have the best people.”

His current school is one the leading schools in West Africa – with an excellent report from the ISI, COBIS Games champions, tremendous academic results, and high expectations from parents and Governors. They need to have the best possible teachers.

“Teachers are the most precious resource we’ve got. It’s a difficult situation – not just getting the best quality of teachers, but trying to get them to more challenging locations.”

filled with international staff. Craig has very clear thoughts about his approach to recruitment, largely influenced by a TED talk by Simon Sinek, marketing guru. He talks about the Golden Circle – concentric circles of Why, How, and What – and the theory that great leaders or companies (or, in this case, schools) start with the Why.

“When I thought about this, in the context of school recruitment, I changed my whole approach when engaging potential candidates. I started with the Why. Why they should come to St Saviour’s.”

He makes a good case for the school: talented children with great personalities; a highly-developed set of values; highly intellectual (20% of students are in the top 10% of GL assessment results); COBIS sports champions; great staff morale; outstanding Governance; family environment; great community.

“These are the best children I’ve worked with. I enjoy coming to school every day. It would be true to say a piece of my heart is in the school.”

For the How, he explains that the school has the highest level of accreditations (COBIS, ISI, BSO Accreditation), delivers the English National Curriculum, excellent resources, Teaching Assistants supporting the teacher in every class, high-quality professional development including all staff having the most up-to-date Safeguarding and Child Protection training. As a Headteacher he tries to create a framework for excellence – for example, teachers have 70% contact time and 30% non-contact time.

“I want the teachers to create fantastic lessons, so they have to have the time to do it. This shouldn’t impinge on work-life balance.”

And the What: it is a school in Lagos, Nigeria.

“Hopefully by then I’ve got deeply committed teachers who have great hearts and want to work with these excellent children.”

He also shows candidates that Lagos is not necessarily what they hear on the news. The location is on the edge of a lagoon, with tree-lined streets, bars, restaurants, cinemas. And the distance from the area that Boko Haram operate

in is roughly equivalent to the distance between London and Oslo.

“Start with the Why and people choose to work for you because they want to. When you get people who want to do it, you get people who do it for the right reasons.”

Once teachers have been recruited, there is also the challenge of retention. The school has extended the salary scale, and Craig believes you need to be as creative as possible with the package. For example, in his time at St Saviour’s, they have changed the travel package from two (or three) flights home per year to a set travel allowance. Staff can use this to fly back to the UK, but can also use it to explore Africa.

“Go where you want to – just get to work on time.”

This is attractive as part of a package, with the added advantage that it is easier for the school to budget.

RETURNING TO THE UK

Craig believes that returning to the UK from time abroad can be a challenge. He experienced it himself when he was moving back to the UK following a headship in Saudi Arabia.

“People are sceptical about teachers coming from overseas. They don’t realise that some of the education here is way beyond what you expect in terms of the quality of teaching, pedagogy, use of resources, how teachers can maximise the potential of students by meeting the needs of all learners at every level.”

But teachers who have worked abroad can bring advantages back to the UK system. He points to the diverse population in the UK.

“International teachers are excellent at embracing different cultures; galvanizing classes together so they are one unit.”

Craig also talks about the transience of students and mobility of families, internationally and increasingly in the UK, with children coming in and out of different schools. Teachers who have worked abroad are highly skilled at integrating new children into classes for example, ensuring



continuity of learning. Many international schools cater for significant numbers of gifted and talented students, and teachers returning to the UK bring with them a wealth of strategies and knowledge around maximising potential.

“I think international teachers know what outstanding learning is; they know what excellence is. Yes, they may be working in schools with lots of resources and children who want to learn and are well behaved, but they know what a great classroom environment should be. That travels well.”



HERMIONE THOMAS
PROTOCOL EDUCATION

Current Occupation: Regional Manager

RECRUITING FOR UK AND INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

After four years of working predominantly with international schools, Hermione is currently a Regional Manager with Protocol, supporting UK schools with recruitment, and dealing primarily with UK-based teachers who are looking for new roles as well as international teachers looking to relocate to the UK. From her experience, one of the main differences is the relative ease of attracting teachers globally to work in the international market as opposed to attracting teachers into the UK education market. In addition to UK nationals, Protocol also works with hundreds of international teachers who come to the UK from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Ireland. Protocol have local offices in these countries, and tight processes in place to ensure these teachers meet UK requirements in terms of safeguarding, training, etc. But the number of applicants from abroad has decreased in recent years.

“The volume of teachers from these offices has decreased recently by about two-fifths. Four years ago there would have been 500 teachers from those offices each year – now it is more like 300.”

Her feeling is that teacher recruitment in the UK is indeed in a critical condition.

“From our perspective, we’re always being bombarded with vacancies. Schools are desperate all the time. There is a sheer lack of candidates.”

Protocol fill a significant proportion of vacancies listed with them, but Hermione agrees that the media coverage about the state of teaching in the UK is probably counterproductive and unlikely to attract people to the profession.

RECRUITING TEACHERS WITH INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

With the current recruitment climate in the UK, Hermione feels that schools are becoming more receptive to appointing staff from abroad or staff who have been working internationally. But it is still an issue for some Heads who are reluctant to consider Skype interviews, and prefer the more traditional approach of a face-to-face interview and lesson observation.

“It is still an issue, but it is becoming an easier discussion than it was.”

She suggests schools that have concerns may need to consider more lateral approaches – such as a term on time-sheets for teachers who are not able to interview in person, before the role is made permanent.

Historically, there have also been consultants working within education recruitment who felt that dealing with teachers with international experience presented a challenge – particularly in terms of monitoring safeguarding, compliance, and DBS checks, as well as the validity or quality of the school and the teachers’ experience.

“What is a British School? What is the IB? So often the process grinds to a halt for candidates trying to come into the UK because their experience doesn’t slot perfectly into the UK system. We need to look at making it a more simplified process.”

And for teachers who have been out of the UK education sector for a few years, it would



be a simple matter to provide professional development on any policy or practice changes that have taken place.

“It is not like they’ve been in a substandard environment. They have been dealing with gifted and talented children, top thinkers, from a real variety of backgrounds. There are lots of really valuable skillsets that these teachers can bring into schools in the UK.”

Hermione feels that many UK schools do not value international experience as much as they should.

“The British education system is one of the most successful exports this country has – schools should be grabbing candidates who have experience in that sector.”

RETURNING TO THE UK

Teachers with international experience bring valuable advantages into UK schools – experience of globalisation, and teaching children who, themselves, are globally-minded. Teachers gain a broader outlook and exposure to different cultures and educational practices.

“These schools offer a multinational approach to education, with all the riches that brings.”

She points out that the UK is multinational in its own right, and international experience can be brought back and used in any educational setting, with any demographic.

“Some of the real success stories are about teachers coming back into the UK, inspiring students and enriching children’s lives with the experience they have gained abroad.”

A significant proportion of teachers who have found international school jobs through Protocol return to the UK. Hermione believes that 80% of the teachers they place come back to Protocol, at the end of their 2, 3, or 4 year contracts, looking for opportunities in the UK. She suggests that teachers move internationally at a time when their parents are well, or their children are young, or they have fewer responsibilities in the UK.

But inevitably there comes a time when family obligations bring them back to the UK.

Teachers working abroad do worry about how easily they will be able to return to the UK. Hermione feels this needs to be a smoother process to make it more accessible and appealing for teachers. It may take the recruitment sector to look at more creative solutions, such as working with Multi Academy Trusts to organise recruitment days in international locations.

Hermione also suggests that it is important for teachers looking at international opportunities to approach it as a clear part of their career development, particularly with the wealth of professional development opportunities available in the international sector.

“Leave with that clear mindset – as part of my professional development in this region I have done X, Y and Z while I have been away, and this is how that experience will enhance a UK school. With that mindset, looking at it as part of their wider career, the return will be easier.”



HENK VAN HOUT
SHELL INTERNATIONAL BV

Current Occupation: Head of Education Services

International Experience: Headteacher in Nigeria, Egypt and Brunei; Head of Education Services at Shell for more than 10 years

ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

In terms of international assignments, Anglo-Dutch company Shell is one of the largest employers in the world. They currently have 4,500 international staff. This is very low, as they are going through a period of reorganisation – in previous years there were c.9,000 Shell staff on international assignments. A significant number of those employees have children, and from the age of 3 until they finish secondary school (18 or 19 years of age) their education is covered as part of the parents' contract with Shell (with detailed policies about fees, SEN provision, local language, etc.). There are currently c.7,000 children of Shell employees being educated in international schools. This includes British international schools, as well as German, French, Spanish and American schools.

Of those 7,000 pupils, roughly 2,500 are educated in Shell's own schools. Shell operates its own schools in Nigeria, Oman, Malaysia, Brunei, and Russia, with support from UK-based education

consultants. In the past, Shell operated more than 30 of its own schools, but this has decreased significantly as the international education sector has grown and expanded.

"In the past, Shell was going into a lot of new countries, and there wouldn't have been any suitable schools. There has been such a tremendous increase in international schools in the last couple of decades. In most locations, Shell would rather go into a partnership with an existing school. And if we feel that the quality is good enough, we advise parents to send their children to that school."

Henk gives the example of a recent visit to the Bahamas, ahead of the relocation of 38 families who are currently working in Barbados. He and colleagues have visited a number of schools, and have identified five schools that meet the required standards for their staff.

"We are always comparing potential schools with the standards of Shell or Shell affiliated schools. The standards in these schools are high; they have a very good reputation, and results that equal or exceed the top international schools in the region."

Another example comes from South Korea. In 2009, following a tender process, Shell embarked on the construction of a floating liquid natural gas facility (Prelude) in South Korea. Rather than start a new school, they worked in partnership with an existing international school to raise the standards to a level that met the threshold for a Shell affiliated school, at which point the children of Shell staff started to attend.

"This sort of joint venture is beneficial for the school as well. It would be an exceptional situation if we were to start a new school ourselves now – there is usually no need."

IMPORTANCE OF HIGH-QUALITY INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

The hands-on involvement of Shell in the education of thousands of children is linked to the



four pillars of their employee value proposition: Security, Housing, Medical, Schooling. If any one of those four pillars is not up to the right standard, it can cause difficulties.

“We have been in a situation where staff will not go to a certain location because there was no school. It can have a negative impact on business.”

Shell’s international staff move around frequently, and children are likely to have to change schools every four or five years. It is vital to have good quality schools to provide continuity and ensure children reach their full potential despite changing schools. Henk also points out that employees on international assignments are highly-trained, with unique skillsets, and inevitably high expectations for their children. The quality of schools, and the quality of teaching and leadership in those schools, is of the utmost importance.

TEACHER RECRUITMENT

Henk agrees that teacher recruitment can be a challenge in the current climate, but finds that the level of challenge depends on the location. He compares the relative ease of appointing someone for a job in Muscat (200 applicants for a recent post) to appointing someone for a job in Sakhalin Island, Russia in the North Pacific Ocean where conditions are more difficult (6 applicants for a recent post). But Shell offer good salaries, and two-year contracts with three-month notice periods on either side (but rarely find teachers choosing to give notice). After those two years they extend contracts one year at a time. They also approach recruitment by maintaining a steady pool of 50 available teachers.

“Teachers can apply to our Shell pool. For headteachers, the beauty is that these teachers have been pre-screened and the recruitment process is therefore much shorter.”

Shell tend to recruit teachers who have a minimum of four to five years of teaching experience, and Henk has noticed a shift over the past two decades towards more appointments of teaching couples or families as opposed to people moving abroad by themselves. This is by no means a recruitment policy, and may have more to do with

international schools becoming more established and well-known, but it can still be beneficial.

“In some locations, if it is quite remote, if a family or teaching couple are going out they tend to stay longer.”

Teaching staff in Shell and Shell affiliated school are predominantly internationally trained, with the majority coming from the UK. Henk points out that parents, whatever their nationality, prefer their children to be taught by a native English speaker.

“But this is not necessarily the key to success – you can have an excellent science teacher, for example, from Norway, or Finland, or The Netherlands – star teachers in a certain subject area who are not native English speakers.”

Shell also have talented teachers who have been recruited locally, and are supporting many of them to gain further international qualifications.

“In Brunei, for example, we have been encouraging talented local teachers to complete a Masters’ degree in England or Australia. We are growing those teachers, and they are now permanently appointed in an international school.”

VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Having worked with countless international schools and teachers over the years, Henk highlights international mindedness as a key characteristic for those working in the international schools’ sector.

“Honesty, integrity, respect for people, valuing other cultures and religions – if these belong to your core values, then you will be successful in any international setting.”

In addition to increased international awareness, those who have worked internationally bring other advantages and skills back with them if they return to the UK. Henk offers a football analogy:

“They are much better teachers after working in our schools. But that is the same as the Premier league. If you can play in one of the top teams, and after a couple of seasons you end up in the Championship league, you are still going to bring experience of the Premier league.”



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