

Overseas Trained Teachers (OTTs): the four year rule

To become a fully qualified teacher in the England, all teachers must gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), including those who trained overseas. QTS is a standard that shows teachers have met the required professional level to teach in England. If you trained abroad and have a teacher training qualification recognised by the relevant competent authority in your home country, you can work as an overseas trained teacher in a school. The job is called an unqualified teacher position, as you do not yet have QTS. You should gain QTS within four years of when you started work, so you can continue to work as a full teacher. The information below will guide you through the definitions of an overseas trained teacher, how the time limit for QTS relates to employment in England, and what training you can do to gain QTS.

Am I an overseas trained teacher?

Firstly, you need to find out if you have a teaching qualification recognised by the relevant competent authority from your home country. To find out if your qualification is a recognised form of teacher training, you can contact UKNARIC (www.uknaric.org.uk) – your NARIC certificate will say “qualifies the holder to teach in Zimbabwe” for example. Refugees into Teaching does this service free of charge for everyone registered on the refugee teachers database. Alternatively, individuals can go to NARIC directly for a small cost. If you have this, you are then classed as an **overseas trained teacher**, and are allowed to work as an unqualified teacher for up to four years

If you are not classed as an overseas trained teacher, there are other options available to you, such as studying for the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) or finding paid employment as a trainee teacher and following the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP). Both are forms of postgraduate teacher training leading to QTS. A small minority of teachers who are very experienced, and know the education system very well here, can also apply for QTS through assessment only, meaning they do not require further training.

Secondly, even though you can technically begin to work in a school immediately, it is a good idea to gain some **voluntary experience in an English school**. Places in schools can be competitive, and schools strongly favour candidates who have UK experience on top of their experience from overseas. Most people applying for jobs who are living in the UK, regardless of their nationality or country of origin, arrange some short term voluntary experience in a school. This gives proof you have an understanding of the English education system, as well as teaching methods used here. There is no set process for gaining voluntary experience; people approach schools individually to ask whether they can observe lessons. Most people volunteer for fifteen days or more, either all at once, or for a certain amount of time each week over a longer period.

Applying for a job

Once you have confirmed your overseas teaching qualification, and gained some voluntary experience in a school, you are in a position to apply for work. You can either register with a supply agency, or begin to look for jobs that will accept overseas trained teachers (OTTs).

As an OTT, there are two ways to find a teaching job in the England. You can do this by either becoming a supply teacher, or through applying for a position directly with a school or Local Authority. A supply teacher is someone who teaches a school class when the regular teacher is unavailable; this may be through illness, personal leave or other reasons. Supply agencies will normally ask for at least four to six weeks of UK experience before they will take a teacher. The supply job may last for a term or more, but they are often last minute roles for one or two days.

Alternatively, you can apply directly to a school or Local Authority when you have seen a job advertised.

The four year rule

To become a fully qualified teacher in England, you should gain **Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)** in addition to your home country qualification. If you already have a teaching qualification from overseas and are working in a school, you must gain QTS within **four years of the first day you start teaching**. This is known as the “**four year rule**”. This is four calendar years, rather than the length of time you actually teach in this period. For example, if you are a supply teacher and don't work full time, or have a gap in teaching for a period of time, you will still be expected to gain QTS within four years of your first day employed as a teacher. This also does not change if your immigration status changes. For example, you may have entered the UK on a visa and worked as a teacher for two years, then submitted an asylum claim, you must still gain QTS during the four year period. Extra time to gain QTS is only given if you have taken maternity or paternity leave during the four year period. If you don't gain QTS within this period, even if it is due to a change in your immigration status, you will no longer be able to work as an unqualified teacher, and should then follow a non-employment based route to QTS, such as a PGCE.

Securing a job – next steps

Once you have found a job in a school, or received work through a supply agency (regardless of how long the job is for), you must by law provisionally register with the **General Teaching Council for England (GTCE)**. This law is for all overseas trained teachers in schools, anyone already working in a school should also register as soon as possible, as this became law on 01 September 2009. You should register within two weeks of starting your first job. There is an application form to fill in and post, which can be found at http://www.gtce.org.uk/registration/provisional_registration/. Your school or supply agency will check that you have registered with the GTCE.

If you have a position in a school, you should then take steps to gain QTS through an employment based route. The training route for overseas trained teachers is the **Overseas Trained Teacher Programme (OTTP)**. To be eligible for this programme, you need to have the following qualifications before you can begin:

- A teacher training qualification recognised by the relevant competent authority in your home country, and assessed as equivalent by UK NARIC.
- The equivalent to a UK bachelors degree, assessed by UKNARIC. This degree should usually be in the subject you want to teach if you wish to teach at secondary level. If you do not have the equivalent to a full UK bachelor degree, you will need to top-up your degree. There are many universities that offer this service, some are listed through the following link:
<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/1%20want%20to%20%20Tasks/Top-up%20degrees%20-%20entry%20to%20year%203.doc>

You can teach as an unqualified teacher if you do not have a full degree, but do have a recognised teaching qualification. However, you must have a full undergraduate degree to be able to follow the OTTP. You must still complete the degree top-up and gain QTS within four years.

- If you have a degree equivalent and teacher training, but do not have the required GCSE equivalents, you can either study for these in a Further Education (FE) college, or by taking an equivalency test. Contact the Initial Teacher Training Provider you would like to follow the OTTP or PGCE with, and they will be able to give you further information. A full list of providers can be found at:

[.http://www.tda.gov.uk/partners/recruiting/ebr/drbs/ebittcontacts.aspx](http://www.tda.gov.uk/partners/recruiting/ebr/drbs/ebittcontacts.aspx)

If you wish to follow the OTTP, you should speak to the school to ask if they will support you to gain QTS. If they are able to, you should then look for an Employment Based Initial Teacher Training (EBITT) provider in your area that has places available to support you. A full list of EBITT providers can be found through the Training and Development Agency for schools (TDA) website:

<http://www.tda.gov.uk/partners/recruiting/ebr/drbs/ebittcontacts.aspx>.

Normally you submit an application to the training provider jointly with the school you are working at. However, sometimes the school you are working in cannot support you due to the short length of your contract; the OTT takes at least one term, but could take up to a year. If you are working as a supply teacher on very short term jobs, it may be difficult to follow the OTTP. Schools normally will not arrange this for teachers on shorter term supply contracts in a school.

Options for those who haven't gained QTS within four years

If you have not gained QTS within four years, even if you are doing training when the four years ends, you will no longer legally be allowed to teach in state maintained primary and secondary schools. There are some options available at this point. One is to follow a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at your chosen level and subject. Alternatively, you can look for a job in an independent school, as they do not follow the same system, and may not require you to have QTS. However, there are only a small number of independent schools across the country compared to state maintained schools.

Some schools will continue to employ you if you have not got QTS within four years, although you will then be classed as an **instructor**. They can do this only if they do not have anyone qualified or a trainee that can take the position. While the job you do will essentially be the same, you will no longer be a member of the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE). The school may also make changes to your contract and salary to reflect the change to an instructor. It will also mean you may have difficulties in securing another job if this one ends, as you can only look for another instructor position. There are very few positions like this, as schools are strongly encouraged to employ only qualified or trainee staff.