

A Reflection on Teacher Training at Blundell's School by Hannah Perrin-Haynes

Life before teaching

When you follow the path of academic English Literature, there are certain inevitabilities. One of them is the question: do you want to be a teacher? My answer was always a resounding no. My obsession with words was, in truth, a selfish one; I was too busy enjoying expanding my own understanding to worry about the understanding of those younger than me.

But working at the Bodleian library while studying literature only partially pays the bills and other opportunities were starting to cross my path. Eventually, I moved to London to work on strategic policy development in the Department for Education, at an interesting time of political change when Gordon Brown was moving out and the coalition was moving in. From there, I shifted to cultural strategy with the Scottish Government, witnessing the increasing clamour of the independence movement. Later, I took up a diplomatic posting at the British Consulate in Toronto, championing Scottish cultural and business interests across North America. All the while, I continued my PhD in modernist collaborative identities. My love for literature endured. In fact, it intensified. The further I strayed from academia, the more I missed it. For all the influence of policy, strategy and diplomacy, the impact never quite felt tangible enough. Then, someone asked me again: would you ever consider becoming a teacher? And this time, to my own surprise, I said yes.

The Case for Teaching

Teaching has become an increasingly attractive option for career changers. It offers intellectual fulfilment, personal purpose and a profound opportunity to make a difference. Age is no barrier; indeed, life experience enhances your capacity to teach with empathy, clarity and conviction. A recent article in *The Times* reported a 67% rise in over-50s starting teacher training over the past two years, even as total trainee numbers across all age groups dropped by 2% in England. The charity *Now Teach*, which exists to attract and recruit experienced and successful people to change career into teaching, states that since 2017, they have supported more than 1,100 later-stage career changers into teaching, focusing on recruiting those who can teach shortage subjects like languages and STEM to help fill critical gaps in schools across England. Their CEO, Graihagh Crawshaw-Sadler, told *The Times*: "The post-Covid years have accelerated this trend as talented individuals seek a career that gives back."

For me, the appeal was about impact. I wanted to share my passion for literature, not just in abstract academic spaces but in real classrooms with real students, shaping how they see the world and themselves. That is where Blundell's came in: part of a teaching school alliance, renowned for offering an employment-based training route that produces excellent teachers and the chance to teach and train simultaneously, gaining classroom experience while earning the qualification. Applying for the job turned out to be one of the best decisions I've ever made.

Training at Blundell's

On arrival at Blundell's, I was welcomed into a structured, thoughtful and deeply supportive training environment. It soon became clear that the practice of training teachers is part of the bread and butter of the school. Vicki Gill, as the Director of Staff Development, made the process seamless, always available for questions and offering invaluable pedagogical insights. I was mentored with care and dedication by the highly experienced Emily Worthington, who guided me not only through the mechanics of the classroom but also through the more subtle nuances of teaching. Alongside the pedagogical training, I was coached in pastoral care by Sarah Holman, who taught me the intricacies and unique demands of working within a boarding school environment. It soon became clear that this holistic view of education — intellectual and emotional, academic and pastoral — is woven into the fabric of life at Blundell's.

My teaching timetable comprised of Years 8, 9, 10 and 12 and I quickly learned that classroom theory and classroom reality are two very different beasts, but the training programme bridged the two with care. We studied child development, behaviour management, SEND inclusion and emotional regulation. Everything I learned could be implemented the next day. My placement at Uffculme School allowed me to experience a different context and compare approaches, enriching my understanding, and I was supported by Belinda Jones, who was one year ahead of me on the course and she shared her wisdom generously.

The academic underpinning of the course was rigorous and my out-of-school training came via the University of Buckingham, whose blended learning model allowed me to develop academically while practicing practically on-the-job at school. Trainees are expected not just to learn how to teach, but to understand why strategies work. That intellectual curiosity suited me. There was a requirement to maintain a comprehensive evidence tracker that detailed the ways in the eight teachers' standards were being demonstrated. Any gaps identified in the tracker, or areas for improvement arising from the frequent lesson observations, were then addressed by a targeted programme of support. At no point are you left floundering during teacher training at Blundell's. They keep a close eye on you and make sure you are not just developing but also flourishing. Alongside this aspect of the course, which results in Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), I completed the full PGCE, researching my own practice and engaging deeply with wider educational philosophy. This kind of reflective academic engagement fosters growth beyond the checklist of teacher standards. It makes you a professional, not just a practitioner.

What sets the Blundell's model apart is its emphasis on autonomy and identity. I wasn't a passive observer in classrooms. I was encouraged to develop my own lessons, my own voice and my own philosophy. I observed colleagues across departments, learning from their methods, borrowing their strategies, building a mosaic of ideas that would form my own teaching identity.

Support Beyond QTS

I was among the first cohorts to embark on the newly extended two-year Early Career Teacher (ECT) programme introduced following a government consultation. Designed to offer prolonged and meaningful support, the structure has been one of the most important aspects of my ongoing development. Regular observations, feedback loops and peer review kept me growing.

At Blundell's, professional development doesn't stop with your PGCE certificate. It's embedded in the culture. In our department, feedback is continuous and non-hierarchical, thanks to initiatives introduced by Kate Borgen-Davis. Furthermore, we contribute to and learn from the annual Blundell's Research Journal, attend Nick Lecharpentier's excellent learning forums and constantly share best practice. Teaching is collaborative, not competitive. We are as committed to each other's growth as we are to our pupils'.

The Pupil Experience

One of the key benefits of a teacher training programme within a school like Blundell's is what it offers to the students. Trainees bring fresh ideas, new perspectives and renewed enthusiasm. They reflect regularly, adapt quickly and learn constantly. Pupils benefit from this dynamic engagement. They see that learning is never finished, that their teachers are learners too.

Furthermore, many career-changers bring a depth of professional experience and life context that enriches lessons beyond the textbook. We can link theory to practice, literature to lived experience. We can model resilience, adaptability and curiosity and we are living proof that it's never too late to follow your passion.

As I reflect on my time at Blundell's, now at the end of my fifth year, I realise how seamlessly my former experiences have found their place in my teaching life. My background in government and diplomacy has enhanced my Politics teaching, my work on strategy informs my contributions to the SH and Pastoral reviews and I am able to offer A-Level enrichment that helps pupils connect their academic learning to real-world contexts, including trips to local hustings, Mock General Elections, Model United Nations and creative writing days. Having studied at five different universities around the world informs my role as the International Universities coordinator and I take great pride in supporting pupils in securing places at world-class institutions. Also, my work on the Extended Project Qualification team, teaching academic skills such as critical thinking, evaluating sources and ensuring investigations are underpinned by robust research, supports pupils with having the skills they will need at university and beyond.

This is one of the things I value most about Blundell's. The school recognises and makes the most of what its staff have to offer. You are not just a teacher of your subject; you are a whole person whose experiences, ideas and passions are welcomed and harnessed.

Looking Ahead

There are days when I think back to Embassy events in Washington or Ministerial meetings in Whitehall with a pang. Those were exciting times. But I wouldn't trade them for what I have now. Not for the pupil whose eyes glimmer when they get a taste of Shakespeare's genius. Not for the heartfelt essays handed in by students who swore they hated poetry. Not for the dyslexic pupil who finally believes they are good enough.

The classroom is where I am meant to be and Blundell's is the reason I am the teacher I have become.