

Adam Folwell



PE Teacher

Name

Adam Folwell

Job title

Physical Education Teacher

Qualifications

BA (Hons) Physical Education with QTS (Secondary) University of Bedfordshire

Introduction:

Adam is a PE teacher in at Christopher Hatton Academy and deputy head of the department. He is responsible for delivering lessons in the classroom and in practical sports. He also has responsibility for a year group to ensure their progression and wellbeing. Adam also works as Lead Examiner for an examining board setting exam papers and leading a group of examiners through the marking process.

And how did you get to the position that you are in today?

I did A-levels, but I failed them as I did not go to school very often. By age 19 I was working in a car auction as my part-time job had become my full-time job. At this point I needed to sort myself out, so I joined the Navy. I did three years in the Royal Navy learning to be a marine engineer. After four years I decided I did not really want to be an engineer and that I wanted to be a PE teacher.

As I had no qualifications I decided I was going to do an access course to get to university but first I needed to get some work experience. I played cricket with someone who was Head of PE at a school and he let me come and do some work experience. I went to the school for one afternoon a week over a 12-week period and then signed up for an access course. However, that summer I thought I'd chance my arm to get a university place through clearing without completing an access course. After an interview I got a place on a PE teaching degree at University of Bedfordshire, as a mature student. This is not a traditional route and I was lucky to get another chance. I would not recommend it!

What is the traditional route into PE teaching?

After studying A-levels or a BTEC course you go to university and there are a couple of routes. You can do what I did which is a PE degree with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). It is a four-year course with teaching placements every year. It qualifies you to teach PE in a secondary school. Or you can do a three-year degree in movement studies or sports science and then a one-year Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) afterwards. The third option is School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) which is a graduate training programme and you do your teacher trainer year in school to gain your PGCE or QTS.

Which route do you think is best, or does that depend on the individual?

If you are fully committed to becoming a PE teacher then the way I did it was brilliant. Because I got so much teaching experience spread out over the four years. I started teaching small groups of primary school children, then progressed to full groups and on to middle and secondary schools. My last year of teaching experience was over a full term and that experience was literally like being a teacher as you are accepted as a member of staff. I think that is a really good grounding in teaching.

The flipside to studying a PE degree is you do not have the deep subject knowledge that sports science graduates have. This is because PE degrees are education-based rather than science-based so the focus is on learning how to teach. This can limit the career opportunities you have. If you are certain that you want to be a PE teacher then the route I chose is the best route but probably not if you want to keep your career options open.

Describe a typical working day as a PE teacher.

It starts with form in the morning and doing the register, and then picking things up from the day before, such as behaviour slips or dealing with emails you have had from parents. I have a pastoral role which is being the school link for the pupils and being the person in school that they can go to if they've got a problem. It also means that I have to deal with pupils when they are in trouble or have behavioural issues at school.

My timetable consists of 50% teaching practical and 50% teaching theory. The practical might be indoors or outdoors and involves teaching a range of sports and developing pupils' physical skills. The theory side involves teaching the GCSE and A-level PE syllabus which covers anatomy and physiology, sport psychology, sports history, and sociology. After school I am involved in clubs as the school has sports fixtures on Tuesday and Thursday. On Wednesday after school we have a staff meeting and on Friday we meet with staff support. Monday is the only day I am free after school, so that is a day when I can catch up on some work.

What advice would you give to students who wanted a career in PE teaching?

I would say go out and get as much experience as you can. I think the best thing that you can do is get involved in sports leadership when you are young by doing courses and finding opportunities to lead sports activities. Get involved in coaching and develop the skills you need to work in a sporting environment with young people. When I did my degree at University of Bedfordshire there were 125 places and I got in through clearing, but now it is a lot more competitive as they only take about 30 students a year. Whether you get a place or not comes down to what you have done in the past and whether you have shown a willingness and a determination to go out and get practical experience. Getting experience also helps you to make sure that teaching is something you want to do and that you have a passion for it.

Also, when you have the chance get as many coaching awards as you can, such as leadership awards, as they give you good experience and make you more employable. I got coaching awards in football, cricket, and trampolining.

Can you describe some of the personal skills that you need to be a PE teacher?

I think you have got to have a sense of humour to survive! The first thing a teacher needs is that you have got to be able to manage and control children. If you cannot deal with and manage the children then it is not going to be possible to teach them anything. You cannot do anything until you've got control and the attention of the kids. You need a bit of presence and confidence to be able to stand in front of a class and believe that these young people are going to do what you say. If they do not do what you say, then you need to be resilient to deal with that.

You need to know that some pupils can be really challenging and difficult, and you need to be patient. You have to learn to take a deep breath, be patient and calmly deal with a situation. When you lose patience and get a bit short with people that's when things do not go well, and you do not have a good day. Losing your temper is never a good thing for anyone. Showing calm authority is the thing. Also, you have got to be a bit of a performer as you have got to come into school and get yourself up for it and then go into the classroom and put on a performance bringing some energy into the room. A teacher can never have an off day or a day when they can take things a bit easier.

This is an abridged version of an interview included in 'Careers in Sports Science' book.