

# Out of the classroom and into the... agency

How Premier Education's recent recruit is making the switch from teacher to consultant.

From the age of seven I always wanted to teach: a primary school visit to Edge Hill University and a chalk board Christmas present and I was certain. I rode the teaching rollercoaster: the amazing moments of seeing pennies drop and lightbulbs switch on in those ever growing brains; the thank yous from parents and from university students who I dragged through A level linguistics and somehow made them love it, almost, as much as me, and a nomination for 'outstanding teacher of the year' in the National Teaching Awards that I didn't have a chance to win because there was no way school would be paying me to take my class to Africa to work miracles, but appreciated the nod of approval. But four Ofsted inspections later, three head teachers, school Notice To Improve category to climb out of, budget cuts, a bit of family tragedy thrown in and a strange curiosity about what a weekend-without-work-in-it might look like, had me taking those childhood blinkers off and considering the big wide world.

And so a friend of mine introduced me to the directors of Premier Education as a way of allowing me to use my education background in a very different way, and they decided to take a chance on the teacher turned Houdini making an escape from the confines of the classroom. And the rest as they say is...

Not quite history - I haven't been doing it long enough for it to be called that; nor was it so straightforward in the beginning. I had a number of agency demons and issues to get over before I could consider become part of THE SUPPLY AGENCY. Examples from my time as a teacher when I was let down by supply provision, and some of the horror stories of those strangers that sat on the grey chairs at the back of the staffroom had left an impression! The Supply Agency was something you went to if you were desperate because you couldn't get a "proper job" wasn't it? Its agents were cash vampires, sucking the funds out of the schools and the life out of the teachers! It was run by dodgy car salesmen who had never set foot in a school and would just as readily sell you an H reg Ford Escort with manual choke as a clapped out old teacher who doesn't get into first period without their third cup of coffee.

I couldn't have been more wrong! My introduction and taster days in the office allowed me to really see how the agency ran, take part in its daily activity and see its ethos in action. Shortly after I was convinced I went through the usual application and interview process and became a member of the team. There were a number of consultants who, like me, had been teachers in their earlier careers and for various reasons had decided it wasn't for them, but wanted to use their knowledge and understanding of the needs of teachers, of schools and classrooms to work hard to make the right matches between them.

I met a number of candidates who were CHOOSING a life of supply for the flexibility, the range of experiences, and the opportunities that it provided them. Suddenly they were able to sample life in dozens of schools and find the ones that were right for them and sure enough they would become a familiar face in a couple and then find long term opportunities when they arose in the places they had chosen. Like me, some had found themselves in situations where full time teaching wasn't right for them anymore, but the pull of the classroom was too strong and so they had found a situation that made it workable for them.

Head teachers and business managers would find themselves in sometimes impossible situations: emergency absences and long term sickness; a restriction of time or money to advertise for the right candidate; a need for intervention teachers to work alongside their permanent staff; these amongst a thousand other reasons would make them CHOOSE to call an agency for help.

Now I am part of that, I see the difference that I can make providing the highest level of service that I can; putting my twelve years as a teacher to good use: to get the most information from the candidate so that I can help them the best I can to find the right type of work, the right role and the right school for them; and when the schools make the call I can really help them find the best candidate, the right experience, the most suitable person: I am able to facilitate those matches.

It has quickly become a way of keeping seven year old me content: I am supporting my colleagues in schools across the North West and helping people find opportunities for work in many different ways; teaching vicariously through those that I place, and reliving the classroom through the stories shared in my

interviews with them. My experience in the classroom allows me to anticipate some of the questions or issues they may face on a daily basis and fully support our teachers in different ways, including sharing my own experiences and lesson ideas too. The hours are long, and it can be highly pressured at times, but the rewards are immediate, and when it goes well the job satisfaction is high, and a weekend-without-work-in-it is a reward in itself!

I am very proud and happy of the work that we do at Premier Education and am always grateful for the opportunity to be part of the team here. It has allowed me to learn from my own experiences earlier in my teaching career to better help those I work with now as a consultant, and I have overcome a lot of the prejudice and misconceptions I held. So if ever the calls of the classroom ever get too loud to ignore in the future, I will certainly be calling on the team to pave the way back to it again.