

‘I’m blessed to have the best of both worlds’: how one busy mum found balance with a portfolio career

A part-time role teaching in further education gave mother-of-four Mehnaz Ibrahim-Khan the flexibility to work around family life – and her industry job
by [Georgina Fuller](#)



Mehnaz Ibrahim-Khan now shares her business experience with her students. Photograph: Christopher L Proctor/The Guardian

Mehnaz Ibrahim-Khan is always on the go. When the 34-year-old isn't looking after her four children, aged one to 10, she's at one of her two part-time jobs. "As a parent, I am very used to multitasking and switching from one thing to the next," she says. "The trick is to be as organised as possible and plan ahead."

After studying for a degree in business management, Ibrahim-Khan got a job as a junior accounts receivable administrator at a security firm. Fast-forward 10 years, and she's worked her way up to a multifaceted role working across multiple departments. "As it's a small business, I'm expected to wear different hats all the time and adapt my skillset as the business grows," she says. "I now manage the whole accounts department,

overseeing accounts receivable and accounts payable, along with liaising with our accountants. I'm also in charge of HR and payroll, and assist on the marketing and sales side of things too."

Ibrahim-Khan's first experience of further education (FE) was as a vocational student, and she relished the fact her teachers were also experts in their field. "What sets FE apart from school is that you are typically taught by industry professionals – people who have first-hand experience, skills and knowledge in the field their students have chosen to study. It's more practical in that sense, whereas in other settings teaching can be very textbook and theoretical."

It's therefore no surprise that after 10 years in industry, she decided to make more of what she knows by sharing her skills with FE learners. Like 46% of FE staff working at colleges, Ibrahim-Khan lectures part-time – in her case alongside her industry job, something she believes gives her an important edge. "I love the fact I can use my knowledge and expertise in my teaching role to help give my students an insight into the working world," she says. "I think that practical experience is invaluable for me and for them."



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Although you don't need any specialist qualifications to start teaching in FE, Ibrahim-Khan began her journey by studying for a PGCE part-time, alongside her part-time job at the security firm and her family duties. At times when her plate felt the fullest, she reminded herself who she was working so hard for. "My main motivation is that I want to be a good role model to my children," she says. "My eldest daughter has a little classroom in her bedroom with a whiteboard and imaginary students. She wants to be a teacher too. I love the fact I can be someone for her to look up to."

Her hard work has paid off. She impressed her tutor so much that they referred her to the business department of Nescot (North East Surrey College of Technology), where she was offered a position as a sessional teacher in September 2019. Then, in January 2020, she was made a permanent member of staff.

This year, she's teaching units in promoting and financing an enterprise idea, and personal and business finance. She also became the centre lead for the Young Enterprise scheme. "My level 3, year 2 students' enterprise, 'Scion', won the overall company of the year prize and the best e-advert prize," she says proudly. "Being part of the whole learning process, watching them develop their skills, and having the opportunity to inspire their thinking, is the reason why I got into teaching. It's just such an honour to make a positive difference and be that positive role model that might be missing in their lives."



In her industry job, Ibrahim-Khan is in charge of her company's accounts department, HR and payroll

For Ibrahim-Khan, one of the greatest joys of working in FE is the chance to support her learners and impart life skills as they prepare to leave the world of education and enter the workforce. "By the time children leave school at 16 they are able to work, so at the very least they should be able to understand how a wage slip works," she says. "My students have chosen to study finance, so they are already invested in the first step of their career, but some of them, for example, didn't realise they would have to pay back an interest-free overdraft or understand how their payslip is broken down. I love it when I see that lightbulb go on and that they suddenly get it."

In fact, in many ways, she sees her young learners as an extension of her family. "I've always been like an agony aunt to my nieces and nephews and I love the fact I'm able to nurture my students too," she says. "Some of my first cohort of students have never sat an exam because their GCSEs were graded [because of Covid], so they are now about to sit their first finance exams and are understandably nervous. As teachers, we've all had to adapt to make it as easy as possible for them."

Two-and-a-half years into her life as a dual professional, Ibrahim-Khan has no regrets. "I love that teaching in FE allows flexibility, which other education settings may not be able to offer," she says. "Although teaching is a whole different ball game in comparison to accounting, teaching in FE

brings the two together in an inspirational way. I love that I get to use my skills and experiences from one industry to inform the other, and no two days are the same. I'm blessed to be able to have the best of both worlds."

Your skills are more valuable than you realise. If you have relevant experience working in industry, you can start teaching in FE with no formal teaching qualifications. To find out how you can change lives without changing careers, head to teach-in-further-education.campaign.gov.uk