

# ‘Now I go home happy’: meet the further education teachers enriching students’ lives – and their own

Originally published in a paid partnership with the Guardian Labs

Job satisfaction can be hard to find, but these industry experts turned further education teachers think they have the answer ...



Andy Foulks enjoyed training apprentices while working in industry, so made the move to teaching

Taking up a new job can feel daunting – especially if you’re already well established in an industry you love. But as we all know, it’s often the scariest decisions that turn out to be the most rewarding.

The Department for Education’s new further education (FE) teacher recruitment campaign aims to attract skilled industry professionals from a number of key sectors, including construction, engineering and manufacturing, legal, finance and accounting, digital/IT and health and social care.

Teaching in FE is a unique prospect, with benefits aplenty – from flexible, part-time contracts (which mean you can teach alongside your current job), to earning while you train. It’s a great way to share your skills, and change lives without changing careers.

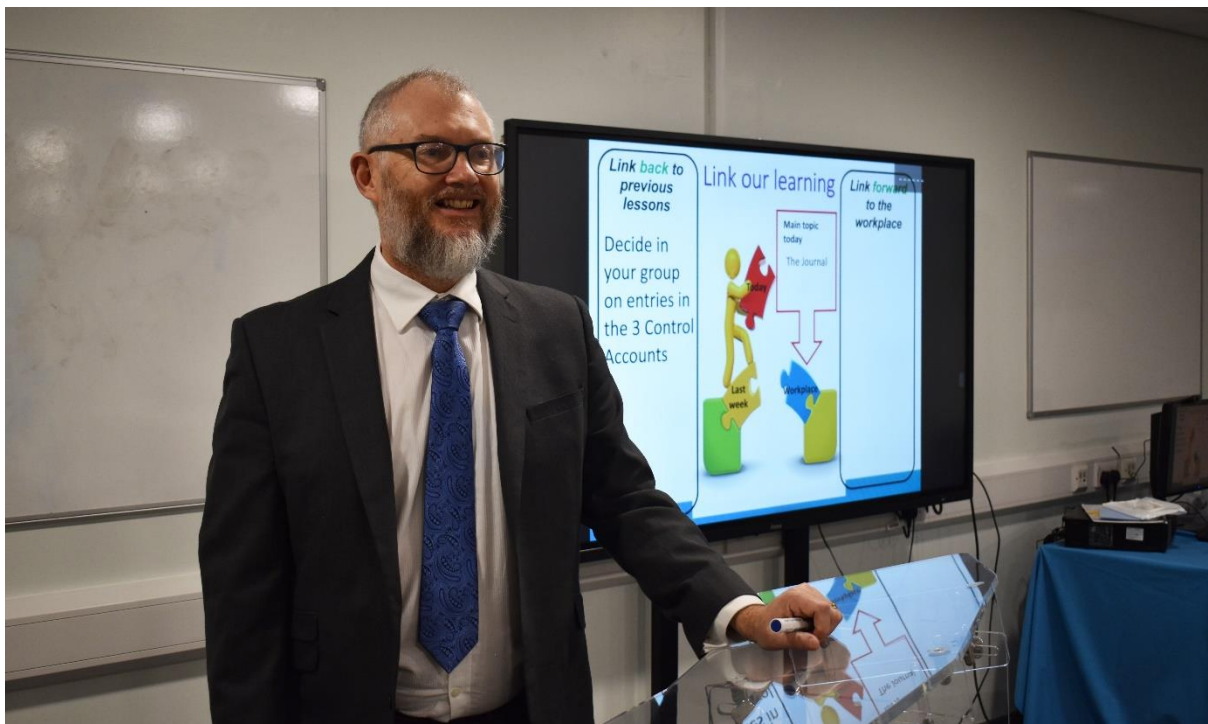
Intrigued? We spoke to six industry experts turned FE teachers to hear their first-hand experiences ...

### **‘I feel like I’m giving a lot back’**

If you’d told a young Andy Foulks that one day he’d become an FE teacher, he’d have thought you were mad. “To be honest with you, even when I was driving to the interview, I was thinking: ‘Do I really want to do this? Is this too much of a change? Am I capable of standing up in front of a room full of people and delivering a subject?’” But this year, the 53-year-old entered his eighth year with Truro and Penwith college, where he’s the industrial lead for engineering.

It comes after a 30-year career that saw Foulks work his way up from a toolmaker apprentice to a technical engineer. During his time in industry, he helped recruit and train more than 50 apprentices, and enjoyed watching them develop. Foulks spotted an engineering teaching job advertised at Truro and Penwith and decided to go to the interview to find out more. They offered him the job before he’d even made it back home.

“It’s increased my faith in young people,” he says. “I feel like I’m giving a lot back to the engineering world, which I’ve had a successful career in.” Foulks clearly takes great pride in his job, which is hardly surprising, as some of his former students have gone on to work at Rolls-Royce and companies as far afield as Dubai. “I enjoy building students’ confidence and developing them not just as engineers, but as people as well. It’s just good to see them grow.”



Anthony Mackin initially applied for an accountancy job at his college, but ended up teaching the subject

### **'It's given me a new lease of life'**

The great thing about accountancy is the opportunity to work anywhere, says Anthony Mackin. The 57-year-old spent most of his professional life working in accounting in the media and third sector, before becoming self-employed – which is how he stumbled into FE. “I had some spare capacity,” he says. “So when I heard that the local FE college was looking for a part-time accountant I was keen to find out more.”

Mackin attended a recruitment evening at Hopwood Hall college in Greater Manchester, where he was encouraged to also speak to the business lecturers who had a vacancy for someone to teach accountancy. He ended up applying for both jobs and was offered the lecturing role. “I always say I didn't get the job I initially thought I wanted, but I got the job I needed,” he says. “It's given me a new lease of life. I was in my 50s when I started teaching in FE and I feel so lucky that someone saw that potential in me.”

Mackin now splits his time between Hopwood Hall college teaching professional accounting qualifications and University Campus Oldham, where he teaches third-year students studying for accountancy and financial services degrees. He's also part of Hopwood Hall college's teaching and learning champion group, developing innovative teaching strategies. “It's surprised me how many opportunities there are in further education,” he says. “If you're looking for a rewarding career where you'll constantly be growing and developing, while making a positive difference to students, then I would recommend it to anybody.”



Moe Dhanji left the construction industry to become a teacher

### **‘Now I go home happy’**

Moe Dhanji was looking for a new challenge when he left the construction industry to retrain as a teacher. After studying for his teaching qualifications part-time, Dhanji joined Peterborough college as an FE lecturer, working his way up to become the curriculum lead for technical construction over the next eight years. “Very few bricklayers get the chance to go into management, but there are a lot of opportunities in further education,” he says. “Society has a view that if you’re not academic, you go into the building trade, you start believing you’re not good enough to do anything else. Luckily my wife pushed me to make the move. She could see how much I loved it.”

Now eight years into his FE career, it is clear Dhanji has found his calling. “You get a sense of pride building something but I get so much more satisfaction teaching someone else,” he says. “I have students who say if they weren’t in construction, they’d be in jail. They’ve turned their lives around.

“I was born to teach and I have never ever looked back,” he adds. “There was something missing in my life when I worked in industry. Everything had become money-oriented and I didn’t have any job satisfaction. Now I go

home happy. It's an amazing thing. If you like working with people, you have to do it."



Donna Green was discouraged from engineering when at school, and now champions the women she teaches

### **'If the shoe fits, it's a lovely shoe to wear'**

Donna Green was at school when she realised she wanted to be an engineer. Sadly, she was discouraged by her teachers who told her it was a boy's job. She went into administration instead and it wasn't until she was in her mid-30s that she had the chance to retrain as a computer-aided

design (CAD) designer at an electrical engineering company. “I got there in the end,” she says. “It seems crazy now that I just accepted that.”

Green spent eight years in the company’s technical drawing room, combining work and study in the final four to take her Higher National Diploma (HND) at college. Once she’d finished the course, the head of the department asked if she’d ever thought about teaching in FE. She hadn’t, but jumped at the chance. “I am very creative but I’m also a people person, and a design office is a bit like being in a library. It’s very quiet, everyone’s concentrating,” she says. “I’m a chatter.”

Green describes the early days of working in FE as a “baptism of fire”, but 11 years later, she’s the operations manager for engineering at Isle of Wight college, and is particularly keen to champion the women in her class. “What I love about further education is the students have chosen to specialise. You can see that joy when they realise education doesn’t need to be a burden,” she says. “Teaching is a vocation, but if you do take it on and the shoe fits, it’s a lovely shoe to wear.”



Naeem Siraj felt inspired to teach the next generation of lawyers

### **‘You have the chance to inspire a whole generation’**

Most people slow down when they retire, but having spent 22 years as a barrister, Naeem Siraj decided to try his hand at teaching in FE, aged 58. “I had become very despondent about the state of the law; that profit was being put before the pursuit of the right answer,” he says about his last few years in practice. “I felt that our future lies in these young minds, and if we train them well enough, with integrity and an appreciation of the power of the law, they will turn into fabulous lawyers.”

He went on to teach undergraduates at Leeds City college, before settling at Barnsley college, teaching law at level 3. “Being able to instil that passion and interest in the law from an early age is so important,” he says. “It’s fantastic to see the recognition in their eyes when they understand the legal principles I’m explaining to them.”

After spending six years in FE, Siraj has just retired for the second time, and now looks back fondly on his second career. “I’ve certainly never regretted it,” he says. “You have the chance to inspire a whole generation. I met some wonderful young people and got a great deal back.”



Elisha Soanes, a diversity and inclusion champion, says that her industry experience has been invaluable

**‘It’s such a creative, rewarding job’**

Elisha Soanes has always been a champion for diversity and inclusion. The 32-year-old spent 10 years working across the health and social care sector, from supporting looked-after children and people with disabilities, to domiciliary care and the probation services. “I learned the importance of empowering people from all backgrounds and making sure they had a voice,” she says.



After becoming a mum, Soanes longed for more flexibility in her career so she could balance her family life and her work supporting young people. “The hours in health and social care can be quite long, and a friend suggested teaching in FE – I was already running training in safeguarding and person-centred care so it felt like a good fit.”

Six years later, she’s the equality, diversity and inclusion coordinator at West Suffolk college, in Bury St Edmunds, which has become the first in the UK to teach Black history all year round. Soanes also recently won the Association of Colleges’ president’s award for her contribution to equality and diversity. She still teaches health and social care, and says her industry experience has been invaluable. “It’s such a creative, rewarding job,” she says about FE. “As Nelson Mandela said, education is the most powerful weapon we have to change the world.”

*If you have relevant experience working in industry, you can start teaching in FE with no formal teaching qualifications – and you can even teach alongside your current job. To find out how you can change lives without changing careers, head to [teach-in-further-education.campaign.gov.uk](https://teach-in-further-education.campaign.gov.uk)*