

Teaching in further education alongside his industry job gave an IT expert the variety he craved

Originally published in a paid partnership with the Guardian Labs

Keen for a new challenge, IT professional Christian Nunez Fuentes took a course at Bedford college ... and soon ended up teaching there himself



IT professional and further education teacher Christian Nunez Fuentes. Photograph: Christopher L Proctor/The Guardian

Christian Nunez Fuentes's path into further education (FE) has been one of twists and turns. Brought up in Peru, at the age of 22 he moved to the UK to study English – a language he proceeded to learn from scratch. That led to a 13-year career in retail IT, initially as a technician and then as a business account manager and supervisor, in areas such as customer service, logistics and sales.

Deciding it was time for a change, in 2016 Nunez Fuentes set up his own web design company. At the same time he took a Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) in computing and

systems development at Bedford college, an FE provider based in the town of the same name.

It was the head of computing at Bedford college who suggested he might want to make more of his knowledge by teaching in FE alongside running his business. It was an idea Nunez Fuentes embraced with enthusiasm. Part of his web business already involved tutoring, and while he was studying, others on his courses often turned to him when they didn't understand something.

And so, for the past three-and-a-half years, Nunez Fuentes has been a "dual professional" – working four days a week at Bedford college alongside running his business, all while studying for his PGCE with the University of Bedfordshire.



Working in the industry as well as teaching lets Nunez Fuentes keep on top of the latest developments, benefiting his students

Nunez Fuentes's job at Bedford college makes full use of the range of skills he acquired in industry: he teaches development, website design, ecommerce technologies, marketing strategies and project management to students from levels 1 to 5 (equivalent to higher national diploma or foundation degree).

He likes to incorporate lots of practical work, including gaming, into his lessons to “break out from the normal monotonous old-fashioned way of teaching”. For example, outside of teaching the theory of how to design a webpage and complying with user requirements, he sets learners practical exercises. “The activity consists of designing a webpage about a specific subject. This way, students learn how to create different layouts using different images to produce the page for a specific product or service.

“After designing a page, it’s time for coding. This is another hands-on practical activity where they not only learn to code the page step by step, but they also gain a realistic experience creating and building a webpage/website using real software and resources.”

His favourite thing about working in FE is the variety. “Even though you prepare the lessons very similarly, every day is different,” he says. “You have to adjust to the mood in the room, and sometimes you have to improvise to grab the group’s attention. That’s what I like – it’s challenging sometimes but it’s very interesting. Time goes really quickly.”

And it’s not only his days that are diverse, but his learners too; while most students on the full-time courses are aged between 16 and 20, on the part-time commercial courses the oldest student is about 50. “The way the youngest learn, the middle range of adults learn, and the older ones learn, is completely different,” he explains. “They have different ways of taking in and retaining information, so you need to change the way you teach, or the way you convey a message, so they can understand.”



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Although it's a full week – Nunez Fuentes works 32 hours at the college and all day on Friday on his business – he enjoys the flexibility of the job. He has three children, aged 13, nine and four, and has arranged his working hours so that he can pick them up from school. He also likes the fact that his holidays are generally the same as theirs.

“Sometimes as parents, you get to a point where you find you want to develop your career but you are scared to do something completely new,” he says. The great advantage of teaching in FE, he explains, is that it offers you a fresh way to use the skills you have acquired in industry and, like him, you can even teach alongside your current job.

Continuing to have one foot in industry has not only benefited Nunez Fuentes – allowing him to stay up to date with all the latest industry developments – but also his students. He's been able to provide work experience for some of his learners, and runs a student competition to design a webpage for a real business; the winners not only receive a prize but have the opportunity to work with the company to develop their website. That has been really satisfying, he says, “because I can see the fruits of what I've been teaching them”.

Still at a relatively early stage of his FE career, Nunez Fuentes's immediate goal is to become a course manager. Ultimately, he'd like to run his web

design competition on a larger scale and, after a few years, perhaps work on helping the government reform the curriculum.

For now though, he's relishing the flexibility and range of his portfolio career. "I'm really happy with what I'm doing now, because I get to have time with my family, and get to enjoy what I'm doing as well," he says. "If you are a person who is bored of the monotony of a normal day-to-day job, this is a great opportunity to change lives while still working in the sector you love."

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](https://www.teach-in-further-education.campaign.gov.uk)