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How to become a teaching assistant

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The importance of choosing the right course & qualification...

After many years of experience delivering courses to home learning students, UK Open College have devised this guide to aid those students unsure of which path to take. By taking a few minutes to read this guide you will be able to make an informed decision before embarking on your chosen career path.

It can be very confusing when enquiring about the range of courses offered online. We receive numerous calls from potential students who have indeed been ill advised and totally confused of which path to take. Many of them have already enrolled and commenced a course that carries no recognition at all. **A very costly mistake!**

There are sectors of employment where holding a recognised qualification is vital. The childcare sector and especially the role of learning support assistant (Teaching Assistant) is one of them. All schools/employers have to adhere to OFSTED guidelines/requirements and they will insist that all members of staff hold a recognised qualification.

When researching the range of courses, there are a few simple precautionary steps you can take to ensure a course will lead to a qualification accepted by schools:

Is the course listed on the RQF?

The Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) was introduced in recent years to help simplify the whole qualification structure. If a course is not listed on the RQF then it is not recognised and will not be accepted by schools.

Does the course have a qualification code/number?

Any course listed on the RQF will have a number that identifies it on the framework. If your course does not have a number, then it is not listed and therefore not recognised.

How do I check if my course is listed on the RQF?

This is very easy to do. Simply visit the OFQUAL website. They can provide information on any regulated and recognised qualification. See the example on the following link:
http://register.ofqual.gov.uk

Does the course carry credits?

Any course listed on the RQF will carry learning credits. Upon successful completion students can use these credits to transfer to further studies in the future. So, if you return to education in the future you may be able to transfer these credits which will save you time and repeating any work previously covered. If your course does not carry credits, then it is not recognised.

Is the course accepted by OFSTED?

Any course listed on the RQF is accepted and welcomed by OFSTED. There is still confusion over this and we have experienced some schools still asking for NVQ's. Schools are required to adhere to OFSTED requirements, and this will be a RQF listed course. Please note: NVQs are no longer available for this sector.

Does every course I take have to be listed on the RQF?

The simple answer to this is no! However, you will be required to gain a RQF qualification initially to be able to work within the sector. Once you gain this you can then add further courses and qualifications to your portfolio as you go. Once qualified all practitioners are required to ensure their skills are up to date. Otherwise known as CPD (Continuous professional development) these can be short courses, online classes or even classes attended locally. We would advise students to check that the certification comes from a regulated awarding body which ensure quality control.

Why would you consider a course not listed on the RQF?

Each individual student will have their own personal reasons for wanting to enrol onto a course. Not every student wants to qualify for employment, many simply want to study for their own personal knowledge. Studying a RQF course will carry a fee to reflect this. Why should a student pay for something they do not need or want? An endorsed or CPD course offers an alternative and generally at a much lower fee too.

So, the simple premise and rules are quite simple if followed. If your course or course provider cannot provide you with the above information, then your qualification will not be accepted. Do not be fooled by the name of the course, its level or title. Some providers will even use the term "diploma" to try and make the course sound authentic. These are not recognised courses.

In recent times we have also received many students contact us regarding special offers received through some of the popular discount websites. Upon closer inspection these are never quite what they seem. The old saying **"you get what you pay for"** has never been more applicable. If you could qualify as a teaching assistant for £50.00 then I'm sure almost every student in the country would take up this offer. Any student registered for a recognised course has to be registered with an awarding body to receive certification. The cost of this alone will far outweigh any costs paid to a discount website. **Don't say you haven't been warned!!!**

We have collated a list for your perusal below which gives you some examples of courses currently offered through UK Open College which hopefully will assist you in making your decision.

RQF Recognised Courses - OFSTED accepted:

Specialist Support in Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools

Level 3 Diploma / Course Code: - 601/4423/3

This is the most popular course we offer and fully qualifies you to work as a Teaching Assistant as well as working with SEND children. It is a RQF listed course that gives you 44 learning credits. You must be able to access a placement in a primary school for a minimum of 1 day per week for the duration of your course. It covers the 11 units that make up the Level 3 Certificate qualification plus 3 that specialise in SEND. The awarding body is TQUK.

Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools

Level 3 Certificate / Course Code: - 601/2731/4

This RQF listed course fully qualifies you as a Teaching Assistant leading to 32 learning credits. You must be able to access a placement in a primary school for a minimum of 1 day per week for the duration of your course. The awarding body is TQUK.

Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools

Level 3 Award / Course Code: - 601/2728/4

Again, this is a RQF listed course. If you are unable to obtain a placement, then this would be the one to consider. No placement is required, and the qualification gives you 12 learning credits.
The awarding body is TQUK.

Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools

Level 2 Certificate / Course Code: - 601/2726/0

Once again, this is a RQF listed course. As with the Level 3 Certificate course it requires you to complete a minimum of 1 day per week in a placement during the course. The qualification gives you 30 learning credits and the awarding body is TQUK.

There is no requirement to do Level 2 before you do Level 3. The courses are very similar in content, although at level 3 assignments are more complex and detailed. For those with previous experience of the sector it may worthwhile going straight to Level 3. This will save you time and money and open up more opportunities for you. However, the choice is yours!

RQF Recognised Courses - OFSTED accepted:

Support Work in Schools

Level 2 Award / Course Code: - 601/4020/3

This is another RQF listed course. As with the Level 3 Award, this one does not require a placement. Again, it is not as strong as the Certificate version, giving you 12 learning credits upon completion. It is more suitable for those who wish to work in support staff roles e.g. administrators and site staff or students looking to progress onto a Supporting Teaching & Learning in Schools course later.

Higher Level Teaching Assistant

Level 4 Certificate / Course Code: - 603/1432/1

Listed on the RQF this course leads to a fully recognised qualification. Aimed at students already holding a level 3 qualification. A placement of 1 day per week minimum for the duration of your course is advised. Once achieved students may wish to speak their school about gaining HLTA status through their local LEA if required. This course offers 36 learning credits to successful learners. Awarded by TQUK.

Requirements for placement:

Courses requiring a placement will require learners to be placed in reception year or above. (Nursery and early years settings are not suitable. This can be on a voluntary or employed basis for a minimum of 6/7 hours per week.

Expert witness:

Your direct supervisor (Teacher) will be required to act as your “expert witness” throughout your course and be willing to witness you carry out any practical elements/tasks required. Feedback/ comments & signatures will be required from your supervisor at various stages of the course. Since the abandonment of NVQs in this sector, there is no longer a requirement for an assessor from the college to visit your placement setting.

Enquiries

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