



Dominique Medley

Course Leader, University of Reading

The French conversion course at the University of Reading is the first part of a two-year PGCE. It is targeted at students with a good level of French (usually A-level) and a degree in any subject, who feel that they have a strong contribution to make to the teaching profession in the area of Modern Foreign Languages.

The conversion year consists of nineteen hours per week – French target language only – and six weeks in a French school as assistants, living with a French family (usually teachers' families). There are three teachers involved: two native speakers and one practising schoolteacher. The course is designed to prepare students for the classroom in the most practical way. It includes eleven hours per week covering grammar, phonetics and the four language skills; six hours looking in depth at cultural aspects of the A level curriculum and two hours of classroom French, including classroom language, games, micro-teaching, design and exploitation of pedagogical material. The course only takes a small number of students: eight to ten highly committed students with a rich diversity of backgrounds and experiences which make them highly employable. By the end of the first year, they have a very high level of French, which is at least as good as those joining the PGCE course by the normal route.

The course is, we believe, the only one of its kind in England and so offers a unique opportunity for those who wish to teach French, but do not have the qualifications required for the normal PGCE route.

PGCE French conversion at Reading University

What the trainees say ...

Leaving university with a degree in Politics, I was not sure what I wanted to do. I decided to move to Paris and worked as a language assistant in a secondary school. I loved it, and then went on to teach English in Spain and Poland. I wanted to teach, but not using my Politics degree. With Scottish Highers in French and German, plus Spanish, Italian and Swedish from university, I saw the French conversion course advertised. It was exactly the thing I was looking for and applied through the GTTR. Luckily, I was accepted onto the course and have not looked back since! *(Clare Robertson)*

With a Business Studies degree and three years' work experience in business, I decided I wanted a more challenging career and eventually decided that I would like to become a teacher. Although I could have done a PGCE in Business Studies, I have always had a passion for languages and felt that my own interest in the subject I would be teaching was the most important factor. I found out about the conversion course from the TTA and learnt that it is designed for people that have a degree in subjects that are not necessarily taught widely in secondary schools, such as social sciences. I think that this course offers an excellent alternative route into teaching and would highly recommend it. *(Zoe White)*

The course content of the PGCE French conversion course is very diverse. It is well structured, with the main emphasis on improving grammatical knowledge in addition to extending vocabulary and enhancing pronunciation. However, there are also more cultural and practical aspects of the course which provide opportunities for practising and manipulating the language in more interactive sessions such as debates and presentations as well as providing an introduction to teaching in a confined and supportive environment. It is definitely a very good precursor to starting a PGCE course in languages. *(Jo Marshall)*

Although the French conversion year does not involve any teaching practice, it is focused towards using French to teach. The cultural components of the course are all orientated towards possible A level topics, such as the study of Provence and the films of Truffaut. In addition there is a weekly session the language of the classroom, which moves from a beginner's level and progresses through GCSE up to A level standard. These sessions involve elements of peer teaching, team teaching and lesson planning, all of which are excellent preparation for the challenges of the PGCE year proper! *(Tom Wisden)*

The time I spent in Nice during the second term was an invaluable language learning experience. Staying with a host family proved to be very worthwhile as it involved full immersion from day one. Working as a language assistant in the local *lycée* was also a fascinating insight into the French education system. All of this built on the cultural studies we did in the first term and made me into a more confident French speaker. *(Oliver Dove)*

Finance might be a deterrent for some people considering a two-year conversion course, because there is no bursary attached to the first year of study. However, the University of Reading does provide some financial support, e.g. during my six weeks' placement in Nice, they paid my baby's nursery fees for the entire period. Financial help is subject to circumstances, i.e. means-tested, but once the request is made, some sort of help is almost guaranteed. The university can in extreme cases help students midway their course with accommodation and will do whatever they can to ensure a successful completion of the course. *(Evelyn Tihngang)*