

# A Practical Guide to Supply Teaching

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## Ready to start supply teaching?

If you've gotten this far, then you are probably considering supply teaching. Go for it! For those that make an effort to build a career in supply teaching, it can be incredibly rewarding while offering a high-degree of freedom. Here's the essentials of what you need to know to make a smooth transition.

### Getting Started

The first step is figuring out how to get work. If you are like most teachers, the easiest way is to have someone with pre-existing relationships do all the hard-work for you. That's why most teachers opt to work through an agency, or increasingly, through online platforms like Zen Educate that allow teachers to earn more (as our charge is considerably smaller) and have less hassle.

Any credible institution that places teachers in schools will be bound by specific checks they must do to ensure you are safe to work with children. This process can seem onerous, but if you pull all the documents together ahead of time, it's usually a straightforward process. If you register with multiple agencies, they'll usually want similar documents so it won't be too difficult.

### Top Tip

The best way to find which agencies or platforms you want to work with is to ask around or do a few simple Google searches. There's no cost to registering with an agency so it is best to speak to 2-3 and then see which ones are the best fit for you.

## What you typically need to prepare

- ✓ Enhanced DBS certificate with Child Barred List check
- ✓ References from two recent previous employers
- ✓ Evidence of right to work in UK and identity such as a UK passport or Visa
- ✓ Proof of academic qualifications such as a PGCE
- ✓ Proof of address
- ✓ Teacher Reference Number

All agencies will require an up-to-date Enhanced DBS. These can be costly (usually around £60). As these can be portable across agencies, they'll usually never pay for them.

### Top Tip

To avoid having to pay DBS charges ever again after the first time, be sure to [register to the online update service](#) within 14 days of receiving your DBS.

Typically, all agencies and platforms will require you to interview. The interviews are usually a quick chat about your experience to date, what you are looking for, and some questions to ensure you'd be able to handle any tricky situations that might arise at a school. Most agencies will require you to do the interview in person but most online platforms let you do the interview from the comfort of your own home over Skype.

## Marketing yourself

Once you've gotten yourself all set-up with a few agencies and/or a platform like Zen Educate, there is still no guarantee of work. It's really important to put your best foot forward. We find the following really helps:



**Be very clear on what type of work you prefer** - not all supply cover is short-term work. Frequently, longer-term assignments from a few weeks to an entire school year come up. Being willing to commit to longer assignments creates more opportunity for work and a bit of stability.

**Have a crisp, up-to-date CV.** Most headteachers will want to see a CV before taking on a supply teacher for longer than a day or two. They'll be especially on the lookout for having held permanent positions in schools so important to highlight those (with the most recent first) and keep your CV up-to-date.



**Brand yourself as reliable and enthusiastic.** Schools and agencies will be assessing whether they'd like to continue to work with you. By always responding to communications quickly, showing up early, and being enthusiastic, you can go a long way towards building a base of customers that are constantly asking to work for you.

**Be flexible with short term assignments.** Having a long commute or the wrong age group can be quite frustrating for an extended period of time. However, by being flexible with the occasional day's work, it makes it much easier to make a living at supply teaching and be top of mind at schools and agencies when relevant roles do come up.

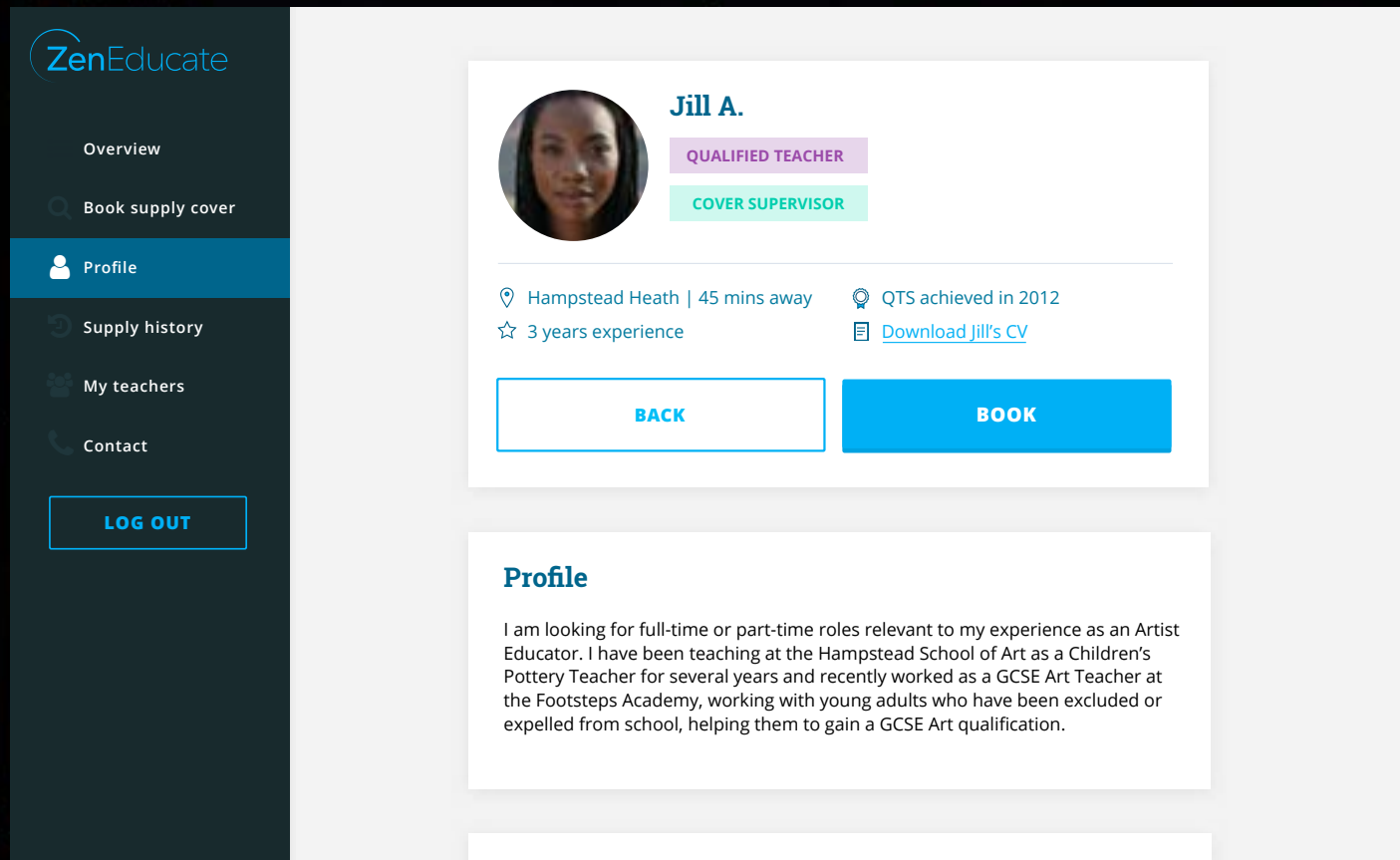


## Dealing with agencies

Agencies charge a significant markup - often 50-75% of your pay to the school. That means less money for teachers and less money for children's education.

Zen Educate was started as an alternative to agencies where teachers could earn more, schools pay less, and everyone cuts out a lot of hassle!

In addition, there's several other benefits to working with Zen Educate from complete transparency of where you are going and how long it will take you to get there to not having to deal with aggressive sales-people that try to push you into unsuitable roles.



The screenshot displays the Zen Educate website interface. On the left is a dark sidebar with navigation options: Overview, Book supply cover, Profile (highlighted), Supply history, My teachers, and Contact. A 'LOG OUT' button is at the bottom of the sidebar. The main content area shows a profile for 'Jill A.', a 'QUALIFIED TEACHER' and 'COVER SUPERVISOR'. It includes a circular profile picture, location 'Hampstead Heath | 45 mins away', '3 years experience', and 'QTS achieved in 2012'. A 'Download Jill's CV' link is present. At the bottom of the profile section are 'BACK' and 'BOOK' buttons. Below this is a 'Profile' section with a bio: 'I am looking for full-time or part-time roles relevant to my experience as an Artist Educator. I have been teaching at the Hampstead School of Art as a Children's Pottery Teacher for several years and recently worked as a GCSE Art Teacher at the Footsteps Academy, working with young adults who have been excluded or expelled from school, helping them to gain a GCSE Art qualification.'

We found the following are really useful pieces of advice when dealing with agencies:



**Asking for detailed clarification on pay.** You'll often find that agencies are like estate agents, in that they lure you in with promises of pay that never match reality. Ask for a detailed specification on rates of pay for short-term assignments (otherwise they'll always quote the highest rate they've ever received usually for a long-term post in a shortage subject just to get you excited).



**Be clear on permanent vs long-term supply preferences.** It is very much in an agency's financial interests to keep you on long-term supply even though you and the school may both prefer a permanent post. If you prefer a permanent post and suspect the school might as well, simply ask around at the school. Armed with that information, it is much easier to approach the agency. (We at Zen Educate make it far easier to convert into a permanent position and actively encourage it when there is a good fit).



**Be firm with the tradeoffs you are willing to make.** If you aren't willing to work at certain types of schools, certain distances from the school, or certain days of the week - be firm with the agency. They are motivated by their commissions and will put a lot of pressure on you to accept roles that are outside of your preferences. Be firm in response to this pressure or work with an online platform like Zen Educate that won't pressure you into a role you are not comfortable with.

## Pay Rates

Rates of pay will vary drastically depending on the location, length of role, subject, and phase of education. In general, short-term assignments will often have a fixed rate with very little room to negotiate. Long-term assignments will have considerably more room to negotiate as they'll have significantly more responsibility. Typically, in London:

### Pay rates for short-term assignments

	Agencies	ZenEducate
Teachers	£100–145	£145
TAs	£50–80	£80

Note: Long-term rates will vary dramatically based on the nature of the role and the experience of a candidate.

It is important to note how you will be paid to compare pay rates. Many agencies will pay through an [umbrella company](#). Perceptions of these have been tarnished as there are a few rogue umbrella agencies out there, but if you are with one of the reputable agencies, they provide a host of benefits.

Umbrella companies work by being your employer of record. When you work through an umbrella agency, you'll receive a higher headline rate than direct through payroll but have employer NI and a small umbrella fee deducted from the headline rate. Most reputable agencies typically try to make sure you are always at least slightly better off in take home with the umbrella rate versus the PAYE rate. The key additional advantages of working with an umbrella company are not having to be on an emergency tax code and doing a self-assessment if you work through multiple agencies. You'll also typically get paid quicker than if you were directly on the school's payroll.

## Managing your bookings

Once you're regularly working as a supply teacher, it is good to remember a few tricks to make life easier:

- ✓ **Use technology to keep track of everything** - if you are booked across a few different schools in a week it can be difficult to keep track of it all. Using reminders in Google Calendar or a similar service can be a lifesaver.
- ✓ **Give yourself time to familiarise yourself with the school** - a new school can be an intimidating environment. By always showing up at least 15 minutes early you can give yourself enough time to learn where the toilets are, the timetable of the school, and your general way around.
- ✓ **Bring a backup lesson plan** - it's quite common to show up and find the absent teacher has not left a plan behind for the day.



## Conclusion

Supply teaching can often feel like a challenging career. However, for those that proactively throw themselves into it, it is possible to achieve a degree of freedom that would be hard to replicate in a full-time post.

The important things to remember are:

- ✓ Be clear on what you want, how much you are expected to earn and how you will be paid.
- ✓ Be organised and open to new opportunities, but don't pressured into anything you don't feel comfortable with.
- ✓ Lastly, you will be doing an amazing job and you will be having a huge impact on the lives of so many children.

