



Case Study:

Get **ON** Abroad



Who are you and what do you do now?

I'm Laura and I'm Head of Art and Design at a British international school in Shanghai, China.

What made you decide to teach abroad?

I trained as a teacher relatively late (age 28!) with the intention of moving abroad after 2 or so years. I chose to do this because I have many friends who raved about teaching internationally. Before training as a teacher I did an MA and DPhil and had acquired a taste for teaching through my seminar groups at the university where I worked. I did teach in the UK for 2 years but always wanted to travel while teaching.

What 'actual' challenges did you face – how did you overcome them?

Challenge is relative and depends on your cohort and the HR department at your school! I've worked for a school where HR will trip over to not take you away from teaching and learning, and a school with a very obtuse HR department. I'd say that building a firm social network is key because you need to diffuse about the stresses of working abroad without rocking the boat. Image is more important than back home, and the expat community is small so a thoughtless rant can become gossip. Schools tend to start earlier at 7.30 or 7.45 so you need to adjust your lifestyle- being the teacher who will stay all hours is less healthy when you need to be in an hour earlier! Set boundaries while still being flexible so you maintain a healthy balance. Don't burn yourself out: Turnover is high so you won't leave a 'legacy' and your replacement will always change what you've put in place (!)

What is your life/career like now?

I was appointed Head of Department in my second job overseas. I'd been teaching for 6 years and I believe there is greater scope of promotion due to the transient nature international teaching. I have a good life style which allows me to travel every holiday, while saving half my salary- largely because my employer covers my rent provides bonuses and pays private health insurance. Schools in Europe tend not to cover rent or healthcare so be aware of that.



What tips/advice do you have for someone thinking about doing the same?

You need to be confident in your skills and employability because it is standard to resign in November. This means every time you move jobs you have to resign before securing a new job (usually!) Stay chilled and really engage with potential employers about what is a right fit for you- a bad fit is amplified more when you're far from home.

Sign up for [Search Associates](#) because they vet their schools. Search helps you hone your application and don't charge you a fee to join if you are from the UK. They are a great network and a teacher with good references can secure a job with or without one of their job fairs. Also, be willing to get stuck in: International schools have had a boom so it's not unusual so arrive somewhere with no substantial written curriculum. It may feel like you are moving from developing school to developing school. Bite your tongue but stick to your pedagogical vision.