

TELLING TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

Chris Lowe and friends

Number 27

Dear Sir, or Madam

Many Heads receive applications out of the blue from both home and abroad. Before the spread of the internet and emails many letters used to arrive after posts had been filled. They were often fervent in pushing their claim and extolling their virtues.... which was understandable...but it exposed them to the risk that schools had to work out what was not said as well as evaluating what was said.

One day Marcus Brampton at Market Upabit School received such a letter applying for a job that the school did not have. It appeared to be a round-robin, a job-seeker playing the field.

Somewhere in Central Africa

Dear Sir or Madam,

The amount of information one can put onto a standard application form is very small, so I am writing this letter to expand your vision of me. I shall summarise my curriculum vitae and explain to you why you should engage me in the position you have advertised (*put in position*).

Basically I left university education two years ago with an excellent degree following a distinguished record in my village primary school and highly satisfactory secondary school career. During my first degree course I met my first serious computer and soldered my first useful circuit. It was an addictive experience. I have been keen on screwing and soldering ever since. Love at first sight is the only comparison I feel able to make.

This experience, plus the remoteness of studying quantum physics in sub-Saharan Africa for my first degree, inspired me to move to the happy-go-lucky environment of algebraic topology and computer tomography and the wonderful machines that fill the department in the University of Edinburgh. Here I very nearly obtained a Masters.

Ah, you might say. This is incompatible with a person who then went into the bush – not in Edinburgh, but equatorial Africa. You might also ask, 'what relevance has this experience in a foreign rural school have for your internationally renowned school'. 'Fair enough, headmaster/headmistress. I just felt I needed a new experience, so I took my computer in my rucksack and accepted a fresh challenge in the forests back in central Africa. I cannot claim that they were a great success initially as the school I was sent to had no electricity. But, undaunted, I got hold of some books instead.

I do not think that this school, where 75% of the pupils come out of the bush after a ten mile morning walk, is quite the same as your school in (*put name of city*) but I think the problems are similar to the ones in your country which we see on TV here....e.g. lethargy of pupils

through lack of food, teachers rioting in the streets outside schools protesting about the low rates of pay, harsh oppressive headteachers who are not as enlightened as you headmaster/headmistress, and severely dilapidated buildings. Your problems and ours are much the same, and I truly think I can contribute to them.

Officially my duties here far surpass anything an English school could offer. I am currently Head of Science, i.e. the only teacher of science..... and Head of Mathematics, and Head of Information Technology, i.e. the only teacher of Mathematics and of Information Technology. I am in the best sense of the word, unique.

Recently I have re-organised the Prep Room and made visible apparatus that has not been seen since the Biafran war in the 1960s – or it could even be in some cases since the 19th century Zulu wars. I know that the pupils value the equipment because most of it is now in their homes. It is amazing how many uses can be found for a spring balance.

Around the school I have repaired our ancient generator – many times – and have invented numerous devices for sustaining the quality and flow of water. The course is called EFL, 'Education for Life. It is popularly known as the DoD, 'Do or Die'.

However, it is now time for me to move on in the world, to move from more practical aspects of education which are useful but not profitable, and embrace more academic topics which are useless but profitable . I am sure that your school, which deserves to enjoy a world-wide reputation for excellent education in useless subjects would be just right for me.

I am ideally looking for a position teaching Information Technology or Computer Science or Science, or Mathematics or Design and Technology Education.

I can also offer lessons in electricity, do-it-yourself, and personal survival.

Please reply by 1st June as I may not last longer than that.

Yours faithfully.

Marcus thought that such a person of ingenuity and resolve was worth interviewing whenever the school had a vacancy – but when the opportunity arose another school beat Marcus to it. 'I would not be surprised if he became President of some republic or other' Marcus mused.
