

Find your perfect match

by Linda Whitney

CHOOSING a franchise can be confusing — get it wrong and you could regret it for years to come. So, before you start looking at franchises, take a long look at yourself.

Choose a franchise that suits your skills, aptitudes and preferences, rather than focusing on the money you can earn.

It must be an area that excites you. 'Running your own business is hard work, so make sure it's a business you can enjoy,' says Carole Stubbs, of Medics on the Move, a franchise that finds homes for professionals and costs £20,995.

Check the franchise suits your lifestyle. Do you want to work from home, premises or a van? Can you work evenings and weekends?

'If you want to be near home, a vehicle-based franchise might not be for you,' says Nigel Toplis, chairman of the British Franchise Association.

The top problem for home workers is loneliness, so if working from home is involved, ask what support you will get from the franchisor or other franchisees.

'In home-based franchises a feeling of team spirit across the network can be vital,' says Mrs Stubbs. See what you can afford. 'The



Picture: DAVID MARSDEN / PAGE ONE

headline franchise fee is not all you need,' says Cathryn Hayes, head of franchising at HSBC. You also need working capital to pay your household bills until you are in profit. 'Work out your monthly personal expenditure,' adds Ms Hayes.

Check your skills. Not having a background in the same industry

as the franchise might be fine — franchisors usually welcome people who are new to their industry. But transferable skills, such as sales, marketing or communication, are almost always required.

'Ask what kind of training and support you'll get,' advises Sharron Davis, who is a director of domestic

ARE YOU THE TYPE TO TEACH?

DIANE TAYLOR, 37, chose the ComputerXplorers franchise because it suited her lifestyle, skills and experience and because she loved the idea. Diane, pictured with her daughters Emily, eight, and Lauren, seven, gave up a career in retail management to spend more time with her family. 'I checked my transferable skills. I was good with people — I'd been dealing with customers and large teams of staff, I'd learned IT skills from courses, and analytical skills from dealing with profit and loss reports for stores,' says Diane, from Narborough, Leicestershire.

'But my passion is my children. I love working on projects with them.' So when looking for a

franchise, ComputerXplorers stood out. 'It involves teaching children IT skills using animation and designing computer games. As a mum, I could see the appeal to children, the hours were flexible, and it looked like a solid business idea,' she says.

Diane started the franchise last year and already employs two other teachers as well as teaching herself, in addition to marketing her service.

Her advice to others looking for franchises is: 'Research the franchise and speak to other franchisees about the pros and cons. It's vital that you can get excited about it.' The ComputerXplorers franchise suits people with interpersonal skills, a passion for ICT, and costs £12,250.

cleaning franchise Kingsmaid, with her husband Mark. 'If you're considering a management franchise, look for training in people management, sales and marketing, administration, customer care and financial management.'

Kingsmaid is looking for more management franchisees to run teams of cleaners. Set-up costs are £6,500.

Ensure your working style matches that of the franchisor. Ask around franchisees, chosen by yourself, to find out what it's like to work day-to-day with the franchise management team. Once you know

what kind of franchise will suit you, shop around. 'Research the options, make comparison and take advice from experts,' says Mr Toplis, who is also a managing director of Recognition Express, the promotion products franchise which is looking for more franchisees with £30,000 to invest, and ComputerXplorers, a franchise which involves running IT classes for children.

■ **KINGSMALD**, 0161 426 1440; **Medics on the Move**, 0870 350 1858; **Recognition Express**, 01530 513 300; **ComputerXplorers**, 01530 513 308; **HSBC franchising**, 0121 455 3438.