



Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

Choosing Your First English Language Teacher Training Course

If you are thinking of becoming a teacher of English to speakers of other languages, and you are looking for a course leading to a qualification that will help you get a job with a good employer, you may be interested to consider carefully the content of this leaflet.

You will see many training courses advertised for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) or Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) - courses which aim to prepare and qualify you for your first English teaching job. It is in your interest to choose a course which will offer you a high standard of training and recognised certification.

Such a course will enable you to gain employment with a reputable employer, will have wider recognition in the field, will enable you to earn more for your work, and will provide a good basis for future career moves.

English Language Teaching (ELT) is a profession like other areas of teaching; a good training course is an essential starting point for maintaining high professional standards for high quality student learning.

If you want to be sure that the TESOL training course you are intending to take is the right one for your purposes, and for your intended students, the following are the most important questions you should ask before you enrol on a course.

Important Questions

1. Who provides the course?

The course may be provided by a university, a further education (FE) establishment, a private language school or other educational organisation or institution.

2. Is the course accredited by Ofqual or by an equivalent body?

Ofqual, (the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator), works with the QCA (the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) and is responsible for overseeing the proper maintenance of consistent standards in external qualifications across most awarding bodies in England. There are similar regulatory bodies in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. If the course is not accredited by Ofqual (or an equivalent body), many reputable employers will not regard the qualification as a basis for employment. You should check with the course provider about course accreditation.

3. Where is the qualification located in the English National Qualifications Framework or in other national or international frameworks?

These are official listings of all Ofqual accredited qualifications. They show potential teachers in training how their chosen qualification relates to other qualifications in the same field. For example, in England, initial qualifications for teachers of ESOL/EFL are usually situated at Level 4, and more advanced qualifications are usually situated at Level 7.

4. What is the name and status of the awarding body?

The awarding body - sometimes known as an examination board - is the organisation which sets the curriculum for the course, validates and monitors the course provider, and issues the final qualification (certificate, diploma, etc.). You should check whether the qualification offered and the awarding body are recognised by institutions in the area where you intend to teach.

5. Does the awarding body have clearly defined procedures for monitoring the course against rigorous criteria?

It is important that the awarding body has a strict and detailed validation procedure before confirming approval for the course provider to offer one or more of its qualifications. Following validation, or initial approval, the awarding body should monitor the course regularly against rigorous criteria, because otherwise high standards may not be maintained over subsequent deliveries of the course. This monitoring should include checking the course content, teaching/training standards, provision and supervision of teaching practice, and the standards of written and oral work during and at the end of the course.

6. Are the admissions criteria and application procedures for the course clear and easy to understand?

It is important to have clear admissions criteria and application procedures, because these help applicants to decide whether the course will be suitable in terms of their previous experience and/or knowledge. It is also important for course tutors to be sure that course applicants have any prerequisite skills and/or competences, so that course participants stand a good chance of being able to complete the course and the assignments successfully. Applicants will need to show evidence of good speaking and writing skills in English, whether English is their first or another language. A serious training course and qualification must allow for the possibility that a participant may fail, and course providers have no wish to see participants waste their time and money by undertaking a course they are clearly not yet ready for.

7. Is the length of the course equivalent to 100 contact hours or more?

The contact hours (i.e. face-to-face with tutor and peers) may include lectures, workshops, tutorials, directed group work, private study with easy access to a tutor and other tasks which are directly under the control of the training institution. A typical Level 4 course would include at least 100 contact hours. If the course is shorter than 100 hours, many reputable employers may not accept it as a basis for employment. This type of course offers one route into the profession. Other possibilities are offered in the Further and Higher Education sectors.

8. Does the course provide opportunities for observation and for supervised and assessed teaching practice?

This type of teaching practice is a vital part of any teaching qualification. A typical Level 4 course would include for each individual at least six hours of teaching practice with genuine language learners, supervised by suitably qualified practitioners. If the course does not include this, many reputable employers may question its usefulness.

9. Does the awarding body manage a clearly defined appeals and complaints procedure for course participants?

In the interest of transparency, participants should be able to follow a clear set of procedures, if necessary, to register an appeal to the awarding body if results or judgments are felt, for any reason, to be unjust or questionable, or if the course did not appear to meet the criteria set by the awarding body.

The types of course outlined above lead to introductory teaching qualifications for TESOL.

10. What if the course you are thinking of following does not meet the above criteria?

It is possible that you are thinking of following a different kind of course - perhaps a shorter course, held over one weekend, or an online course delivered entirely through the internet. If so the following are additional points to bear in mind:

Short Courses and 'Tasters' (shorter than 100 hours of study time)

These courses may be helpful in themselves and you may meet other interesting people who want to learn how to teach ESOL. However, you will not get the full range of input (training in teaching methodology, language analysis, classroom management etc.) that you will get on a longer course, and you will not be eligible for the same range of jobs that a longer course (one that is externally validated, and has all the other features discussed above) and its associated qualification will give you.

Online Courses and Other Distance Learning Courses

Many of these are very helpful and you may enjoy working in the privacy of your home or workplace. However, you may not get the full range of training that you will receive on the kinds of courses described in detail above. Also, you will need to check the element of observed and assessed teaching practice with genuine learners. There may be less of the very good experience of working face-to-face with trainers and other trainee teachers. This is very important for teachers at an early stage of their professional development. Again, an online qualification may not give you access to the range of teaching posts that you would be eligible for with a qualification following a longer, face-to-face course. This will depend, of course, on whether the course is completely or only partly online. A part online and part face-to-face course may be very useful. A completely online course could be useful for teachers already qualified in other curriculum subjects, though an element of supervised teaching practice would be equally vital for you.

Glossary: Some Basic Definitions

Accreditation: The qualification may be accredited by the national curriculum authority, and/or by an independent organisation. That is, the national curriculum authority or the independent organisation gives assurance that the qualification is of an appropriate standard.

Awarding Body: (See Examination Board or Awarding Body)

Course Provider: The school or institution that teaches a course.

ELT: English Language Teaching - a general, inclusive term used in the profession.

EAL: English as an Additional Language
English taught to non-English speakers who live in the UK and who need English for study or other purposes, in primary, secondary and tertiary education. EAL was formerly referred to as ESL (English as a Second Language) or E2L.

Examination Board or Awarding Body: The body that sets and marks the examinations and/or assessment procedures needed in order to obtain the qualification. The 'awarding body' is the institution whose name will appear on the certificate that is given as a result of success on a course.

(T)ESOL: (Teaching) English to Speakers of Other Languages
The expression which is used to cover all forms of English teaching to non-English speakers; sometimes also used instead of EAL or ESL – see below.

(T)EFL: (Teaching) English as a Foreign Language
English taught to learners, both overseas and in the UK, who do not normally live or work in an English-speaking country.

Note: There are many similar expressions which relate to aspects of ELT which are not of immediate concern here. The most common are EIL (English as an International Language), ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) or LFE (Lingua Franca English), ESP (English for Specific Purposes), EAP (English for Academic Purposes), EYL (English for Young Learners), etc.

Monitoring: The course may be monitored by the examination board or by an independent awarding body. That is, the examination board or awarding body checks to ensure that the course is taught to an appropriate standard. In turn, the examination board or awarding body may be monitored by the national curriculum authority.



Glossary terms continued...

Recognition: The qualification can be recognised by employers and/or by other educational institutions as an appropriate preparation for employment or further study. That is, the employers or educational institutions accept that the qualification is a reliable indicator of the teaching competence of any holder who is seeking employment or who wishes to undertake further study.

Teaching Practice: An opportunity for the trainee teacher to teach genuine learners of English under the guidance of properly qualified trainers or mentors; an essential part of any initial teacher training course, even for teachers already qualified to teach other curriculum subjects, since teaching a language is unlike teaching any other subject.

Validation: The course can be validated by the Examination Board or by an independent awarding body. That is, the Examination Board or awarding body checks the course to ensure that the curriculum as offered is appropriate.

Endorsement

This guidance has been prepared by QuiTE, the Association for the Promotion of Quality in TESOL Education, with endorsement from the following organisations:

- **ABLS** Association of British Language Schools
- **ACELS** Advisory Council for English Language Schools
- **ACTDEC** Accreditation Council for Distance Education Courses
- **AoC** Association of Colleges
- **BAC** British Accreditation Council
- **BALEAP** British Association of Learners of English for Academic Purposes
- **British Council**
- **Cactus TEFL**
- **Cambridge ESOL**
- **EAQUALS** European Association of Quality Language Services
- **English UK**
- **IATQUO** International Association of TESOL Qualifying Organisations
- **IH** The International House World Organisation
- **LLUK** Lifelong Learning UK
- **Londosa** London Directors of Studies Association
- **NATECLA** National Association for Teaching English and Other Community Languages to Adults
- **ODLQC** Open and Distance Learning Quality Council
- **TCoT** The College of Teachers
- **Trinity College London**