

## English as a foreign language teacher

### Job description

Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) involves teaching adults and children whose first or main language is not English. This can be done either in the UK or abroad and the students may be learning English for either business or leisure reasons.

Teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) is also a widely used term and is used to mostly mean the same thing as TEFL. TESOL is also sometimes specifically used though to refer to teaching English to people who are living in the UK but who do not speak English as a first language. These students are most commonly refugees and immigrants and need to learn the language in order to help them settle into the society of the country. Their courses are often government funded.

Teaching English as a second language (TESL) or teaching English as an additional language (TEAL) may also be terms that are used but they generally all refer to the same thing: teaching English to someone whose native language is not English.

Teachers of English as a foreign language can work in a variety of settings with different age ranges. This can include commercial language schools, schools and institutions of further and higher education throughout the UK and overseas. Some may also teach in industry, while others are self-employed. Classes are usually taught in English, even with beginners.

### Typical work activities

Teachers of English as a foreign language use a range of course books and materials and also a variety of audiovisual aids. There is a strong emphasis on dialogue and role-playing, but more formal exercises, language games and literature are also used.

The content of lessons varies depending on the reason why the students are learning English, e.g. whether it is for business use for adults, school work for children, etc. The aim of each lesson is to encourage the students to communicate with each other using the structures and vocabulary they have learnt, and to improve the four basic language skills: listening; speaking; reading; and writing.

Typical tasks that may be carried out include:

- classroom management;
- planning, preparing and delivering lessons to a range of classes and age groups;
- preparing and setting tests, examination papers, and exercises;
- marking and providing appropriate feedback on oral and written work;
- devising, writing and producing new materials, including audio and visual resources;
- organising and getting involved in social and cultural activities such as sports competitions, school parties, dinners and excursions;
- attending and contributing to training sessions;
- participating in marketing events for the language school;
- preparing information for inspection visits and other quality assurance exercises;
- freelance teaching on a one-to-one basis;
- basic administration, such as keeping student registers and attendance records.

### Salary and conditions

- Starting salaries vary considerably, depending on the location and employer. They may range from £14,000 to £25,000.
- With considerable experience and usually further qualifications, salaries can become higher and may range from £25,000 to £38,000. The higher-end salaries are usually for those who work in further and higher education institutions.
- Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) abroad is sometimes done on a voluntary basis in exchange for board and lodging.
- Some TEFL contracts include return flights, accommodation and extra bonuses.
- The majority of EFL teachers work overseas, many on fixed-term contracts of between nine months and two years. Some obtain permanent employment, but most work for several employers on a succession of limited contracts. Many teachers work overseas for the academic year (September to June) and then teach English in the UK peak season in July and August. Summer courses usually provide free or subsidised board and lodging. Check contracts closely for details of holiday and sickness pay.
- Working hours vary considerably between employers and may include evening and weekend work. Teaching in private schools may be carried out after usual school hours to widen access. A considerable amount of time is also spent on planning lessons, which may not be included in your normal working hours.
- For those teaching English to refugees and immigrants, an emphasis is put on community outreach, meaning that evening, weekend and holiday work is common.
- Teachers are based in classrooms for the majority of the time but may also be expected to take part in social activities, sometimes in the evenings and at weekends, especially on summer courses for teenagers.
- Self-employment and freelance work are commonly possible when teaching English as a foreign language. Many teachers supplement their salary by offering one-to-one tuition after school hours. Some schools do not allow this, however, so check before

- you commit yourself. In addition, a lot of short-term contracts are available and part-time and part-year work is also possible.
- Continuing government funding cuts mean that temporary hourly paid contracts are more likely when working for further, adult or community education settings, as permanent posts are becoming increasingly scarce.
  - Women are well represented, although some countries may have a preference for men or married couples for religious or cultural reasons. In some Middle Eastern countries, single-sex teaching settings are common.
  - TEFL work can be done in various countries where there is an interest in learning English. There are also opportunities across the UK, although they are mainly concentrated in urban areas with high proportions of residents whose first language is not English (especially for roles in teaching English as a second language).
  - Codes of dress and behaviour vary according to setting. Secondary schools expect neat professional dress, but expectations are often more relaxed in colleges and other settings. A relatively formal appearance can be helpful for some home and community settings as a sign of respect.
  - The work is challenging and can be stressful due to factors such as under-resourcing and insecurity of contracts, as well as workload.

Salary figures are intended as a guide only.

## Entry requirements

Teaching English to speakers of other languages is open to all graduates, but the following subjects are particularly useful:

- English;
- modern languages;
- linguistics;
- education.

There are various qualifications that can allow entry into teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) and most employers will expect you to hold one of them. For entry level, the following are the most recognised worldwide:

- Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) - awarded by [Cambridge ESOL](#)
- Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (Cert. TESOL) - awarded by [Trinity College London](#)

If you wish to specialise in teaching children and young learners (ages 4 -18) you could take either the Certificate in English Language Teaching to Young Learners (CELTYL) awarded by Cambridge ESOL or the Certificate in Teaching English to Young Learners (Cert. TEYL) awarded by Trinity College London.

The above qualifications are available in numerous centres in the UK and around the world and the courses can be studied on a full or part-time basis. Entry requirements for the courses may vary but usually include being 18 years old or over (in some case it may be 20 or 21), having qualifications that would allow you to enter higher education in your home country (in the UK this would be A-levels or equivalent), and an excellent standard of English.

An important aspect of these courses is the teaching practice in classrooms, which many employers will look for. Most employers tend to favour courses that have a minimum of 100 hours input and are validated by a reputable examination body or university. You should look into all of this before deciding on a course.

Distance learning courses are also available, although they do not usually include teaching practice and so you will need to arrange that aspect yourself so that you have some relevant experience. Cambridge ESOL does offer an online CELTA course, however, that incorporates teaching practice into the distance learning.

The type of qualification you choose to take may depend on the length of time you plan to work in TEFL. If you are only interested in short-term work rather than a career in TEFL, you may prefer one of the shorter, cheaper courses but make sure the qualification you take will be accepted in your chosen profession before committing to it. For more details of available courses, see:

- [English Language Centre \(CIC\) - Teach Abroad Scholarship](#)
- [i-to-i TEFL Courses](#)
- [International House](#)

If you intend to work in state schools in the UK, you will usually be required to have qualified teacher status (QTS). The most common route to achieving this is through a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (or Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in Scotland). For further information on entry requirements, see [primary school teacher](#) and [secondary school teacher](#).

To work in further education colleges, you will usually be expected to have qualified teacher learning and skills (QTLS) status. See [further education lecturer](#) for how to achieve this.

Teaching in universities may also require further qualifications such as advanced diplomas and substantial experience. Be sure to check individual job advertisements for details of requirements.

Pre-entry experience, for example as a language assistant in a summer school, home tutor, or voluntary work abroad, is helpful and may be necessary for certain roles. Some short-term TEFL jobs are available even if you have little or no experience.

As well as having a good command of English and the relevant qualifications, candidates will need to show evidence of the following:

- a friendly and confident manner;
- good planning and organisation skills;
- the ability to work under pressure;

- flexibility and an adaptable teaching style;
- creative skills and ideas for planning practical and interesting lessons;
- excellent spoken and written communication skills;
- effective listening skills;
- sensitivity, tolerance and patience.

For more information, see [work experience and internships](#) and [search courses and research](#).

## Training

For short-term jobs, the initial certificated courses are acceptable. However, if you wish to remain in the career and progress, you will need to take further qualifications. This will usually involve completing a diploma and the most common are:

- Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults (DELTA) - offered by [Cambridge ESOL](#)
- Licentiate Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) - offered by [Trinity College London](#)

Candidates for these qualifications will usually need to have a certificate-level qualification in teaching English as a foreign language as well as two years' work experience. The courses are usually offered on a full-time basis (taking around 8-10 weeks) or a part-time basis (taking one academic year). A [distance learning DELTA](#) is also offered through International House and the British Council and is validated by Cambridge ESOL.

It is also possible to go on to study for an MA in subjects such as teaching English as a foreign language or applied linguistics.

The [National Association for the Teaching of English and Other Community Languages to Adults \(NATECLA\)](#) and the [National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum \(NALDIC\)](#) produce newsletters and journals and offer conferences and events, all of which can help with continuing professional development.

## Career development

A higher-level qualification (diploma, Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), or MA) is usually essential to pursue a long-term career, whether in the UK or abroad. Such qualifications, combined with relevant experience, can lead to senior positions in schools, such as subject leader or director of studies. However, most UK schools are quite small, so opportunities for career progression and promotion may be limited.

With the growing internationalisation of further and higher education in the UK, there are increasing numbers of college and university posts, which usually offer greater stability and better pay, although competition is stiff. Again, additional qualifications will usually be required for these roles, such as QTLS status or further Masters courses or PhDs.

Promotion to more manager-level roles usually involves additional responsibilities, such as course development, administration, marketing and promotion, and may result in a decrease in direct involvement with learners.

There is scope for experienced teachers to go freelance, both in the UK and abroad, and to combine some of the following activities:

- teaching part time in a school, college or university;
- giving private tuition on a one-to-one basis;
- writing course books and other material;
- teacher training and delivery and marking of examinations;
- training in business English;
- academic and general management;
- marketing and publishing.

## Employers and vacancy sources

Although there are hundreds of language schools throughout the UK, most teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) work takes place overseas. Employers include commercial language schools, education and development organisations, government departments, volunteer organisations, multinational companies and [The British Council](#). The demand for teachers and the ease of finding work varies considerably from country to country. There are usually opportunities in Japan, China, the Far East, Middle East, parts of Eastern Europe and Spain, Italy and Germany.

In the UK, there are opportunities with commercial language schools, which are found in most large cities. There is a concentration, however, in London, the south coast of England, Oxford and Cambridge. Work tends to be seasonal with summer being an especially busy time.

Other opportunities in the UK include those involved with teaching English to UK residents who do not speak English as their first language. Employment can be found in a variety of places including:

- maintained and independent schools;
- further education colleges;
- training centres;
- community language centres;
- centres run by voluntary agencies;
- religious institutions frequented by minority groups.

## Sources of vacancies

- Search graduate jobs on this site.
- Cactus TEFL
- Dave's ESL Cafe
- EL Gazette
- FE Jobs
- Guardian Jobs
- Jobs in Education
- jobsgopublic
- Local Government Jobs
- OverseasJobs.com
- TALENT (Training Adult Literacy, ESOL and Numeracy Teachers)
- TEFL.com
- Times Educational Supplement Jobs
- Times Higher Education Jobs

Get tips on job hunting, CVs and cover letters and interviews.

## Related jobs

- Further education lecturer
- Higher education lecturer
- Interpreter
- Learning mentor
- Primary school teacher
- Secondary school teacher
- Special educational needs teacher
- Tour manager
- Translator



Written by AGCAS editors

Date: December 2011

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