

Language Assistants Programme

Modern Language Assistants' Booklet

2024-2025

Welcome to the Language Assistants programme!

Since 1905, the Language Assistants programme has been strengthening educational and cultural links between the UK and the rest of the world through the British Council and our overseas partners.

Sharing your language and culture with students in the UK, this programme will also help you to improve your own language skills, learn how to become a more effective communicator, and experience living and working in the UK.

We hope you are looking forward to your time as a Language Assistant and joining the next generation of the programme's legacy.

How to use this guide

This information will prepare you for the assistantship and provides a source of reference and information for both Language Assistants and their employers during the year.

Section 1 provides an overview of the role of a Language Assistant in the UK

Section 2 covers the UK visa process

Section 3 helps you to prepare the essentials before you arrive in the UK

Section 4 provides details of what to expect while working in the UK education sector

Section 5 covers core information about living in the UK

Section 6 is for you to consider at the end of your placement

You can consult this at any point in the year. Some assistants prefer to read it all in one go or you can focus on the specific section that applies to you. We encourage you to read the sections in full and do additional research on any aspects that are relevant to your assistantship.

Please ensure you have read through this document and carried out research yourself before contacting the Language Assistants team with any questions.

Contact us



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Symbols

While all information in this document is important, we have used the following symbols throughout the document to highlight particular aspects.



Language Assistants to particularly note this information



Information important for both Language Assistants and their Employer



Relevant episode in the [Language Assistants Podcast](#)

Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in these notes. However, the British Council cannot accept responsibility for any errors which may exist or for any subsequent changes.

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1 Introduction to the job

1.1 Role profile

As a Language Assistant your role is:

- To improve students' confidence in communicating in the target language.
- To bring classes to life by discussing contemporary aspects of culture from their home country, such as current affairs, education, sport, fashion, films, television, lifestyle, and celebrations.
- To help to make language learning fun by planning activities and projects, and by having discussions with students in the target language.
- To make language learning 'real' - some of your students may never have visited, or even met someone from a country where your language is spoken, so you are their connection to your country.

What will the job be like?

Every Language Assistant will have a slightly different experience depending on the type of institution they work in, the teachers they work with, the students' backgrounds, and the local area. It is therefore important for Language Assistants to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of the specific context they are working in. A Language Assistant working in a primary school is likely to have a very different experience to one working in a university.

Language Assistants who are enthusiastic, keen, and have lots of different ideas for activities and lessons are likely to benefit the most from their experience. Nonetheless, a strong teacher support network is also crucial. You should be approachable, but your students should still treat you with respect.

Language Assistants should communicate in the target language during class time. However, you should not assume that the language level of your students is the same as the level of English of students in your own country. English is, in a sense, a world language and it would be more appropriate to compare the teaching of the second foreign language (after English) in your home country to the teaching of foreign languages in the UK.

You will have the same fully paid holidays as the other teaching staff in your institution and are expected to be present during term time. If you are contracted to work for more than the standard 12 hours per week, you should continue to be paid for these hours during holiday periods. All the information about your contract should be included in your offer letter and statement of employment.

Language Assistants may be asked to:

1. work with the teacher in the classroom
2. work on their own with small groups of students

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3. help prepare students for oral examinations
 4. make recordings in their own language that the host institution can use as learning resources
 5. introduce and contribute to group discussions and role plays in their own language
 6. work on specific topics with small groups of older students
 7. contribute to cross-curricular work in collaboration with other subject areas
 8. help set up links with similar educational institutions in their home country
 9. contribute to an international project
 10. teach or prepare resources remotely – listen to the [Lockdown Learning](#) episode of our podcast to inspire you!
 11. review or prepare resources in the target language

We encourage you to undertake projects in the target language over the course of the year, such as culture evenings, pen pal exchanges, or even performances, which can be highly beneficial for the host institution and create a lasting impact.

Language Assistants are not employed as teachers. You should not be asked to:

- take sole responsibility for whole classes
- supervise or discipline students regularly
- take responsibility for marking students' work or exam papers
- give classes in a language other than your own or cover a different subject to the teacher's classes

Please see the [MLA Code of Conduct in Appendix 1](#) for more information on what is expected of you.

1.2 Who is my employer?



Language Assistants are employed by either the host institution or the local authority.

Language Assistants are not employed or paid by the British Council.

Where a Language Assistant is shared between two or three institutions, you will be told which is your main host institution.

The main host institution in a sharing arrangement should:



- assign a mentor teacher as a main point of contact for HR and administration
- co-ordinate requests for the Language Assistant's presence
- prepare the Language Assistant's timetable and assist with travel arrangements



- unless the local authority is acting as the Language Assistant's employer, the host institution should arrange full payment for the Language Assistant and request reimbursement from partner institutions. This is important so that you avoid tax complications.

1.3 Mentor teacher

Your mentor teacher will be in contact with you before you arrive to arrange to meet on your first day at work, or even beforehand. Mentor teachers will usually be a member of the Languages Department and will be your first point of contact for any queries or problems you may have.



Please refer to our [‘Who to contact’](#) document which includes more information on sources of support throughout the year.

Please see [section 4.2](#) for more information on who you can expect to work with at your host institution.

1.4 Offer Letter

Information about your role will be included in your formal Offer Letter which your employer will issue to you by **mid-July**. This document is essential to begin your UK visa application.

Under the Home Office's immigration rules, the following must be agreed in writing between the Language Assistant and their employer in the Offer Letter:

- **Start and end dates of your post**

For *most* Language Assistants, the period of appointment is as follows:

- **Long post**

- Northern Ireland and Scotland:**

- 01 September to 31 May (nine months)

- England and Wales:**

- 01 October to 31 May (eight months)

- Your host institution may invite you to extend this by one month before and/or after the standard period.

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- **Short post:** November to April (within 6 months) – Your host institution will agree exact dates with you. This period should also include reasonable time for you to settle into life in the UK and allow enough time for leaving the UK at the end of the assistantship.
 - **Chinese Language Assistants:** mid-September to 30 June (41 weeks)

- **Weekly hours**

You can expect to work a minimum of 12 contact hours each week. Lesson preparation time is in addition to the 12 contact hours.

If you agree to work additional contact hours, you should be paid for the extra hours at a fixed rate as outlined in the [rates of pay on our website](#), up to a maximum of 18 hours per week in total. Any additional hours worked should be agreed in writing by both parties.

If your host institution is a boarding school, you may be offered to work additional hours, up to a maximum of 18 hours per week, in exchange for accommodation and/or board. Schools must provide a clear explanation of the accommodation and meals available as well as an approximate value for both in the offer letter to allow you to make an informed decision. It is also possible for schools to offer a deduction in your salary in exchange for accommodation and/or board.

- **Salary**

Language Assistants will receive a gross monthly payment directly from their host institution. Please refer to the [rates of pay on our website](#), which are set by the education authority in the relevant UK region. There are additional allowances for London but living in London is still very expensive. Any changes from rates in previous years are minimal and in line with inflation.

The monthly allowance is based on a Language Assistant working the standard 12 hours per week and is a monthly rate which is not broken down per hour. The only part of a Language Assistant's allowance which should be calculated hourly is for any hours they are contracted to work which are in addition to the standard 12 hours per week.

The salary paid to Language Assistants is adequate to support one person only.

- **Full name and address of your institution/s**

You may be required to work in more than one institution – Language Assistants are often shared between two or three neighbouring institutions. Language Assistants should only be working in a maximum of three institutions; however, some secondary schools may also send their Language Assistant to work at a local primary school for a couple of hours a week.

1.5 Statement of Employment

Language Assistants should also receive and sign a Statement of Employment, which constitutes their employment contract, from either their host institution or local authority. It is a legal

requirement (Employment Rights Act 1996) that this information is given to an employee in writing within two months in advance of their start date. This document should be signed by both parties.

2 Visa Process

Please read this section carefully as it contains important guidance which you must follow to comply with strict visa rules set by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI).

Language Assistants need to apply for a [Temporary Work - Government Authorised Exchange Visa](#), issued under the UKVI Visas and Nationality Service.



If you have dual nationality and possess a valid UK passport, you should check with the organisation that co-ordinates the Language Assistants programme in your home country as to which passport you should use to travel to the UK.

Those travelling on UK passports will not require a visa to enter the UK and should inform their host institution / local authority of this as soon as possible.

2.1 How to obtain a visa

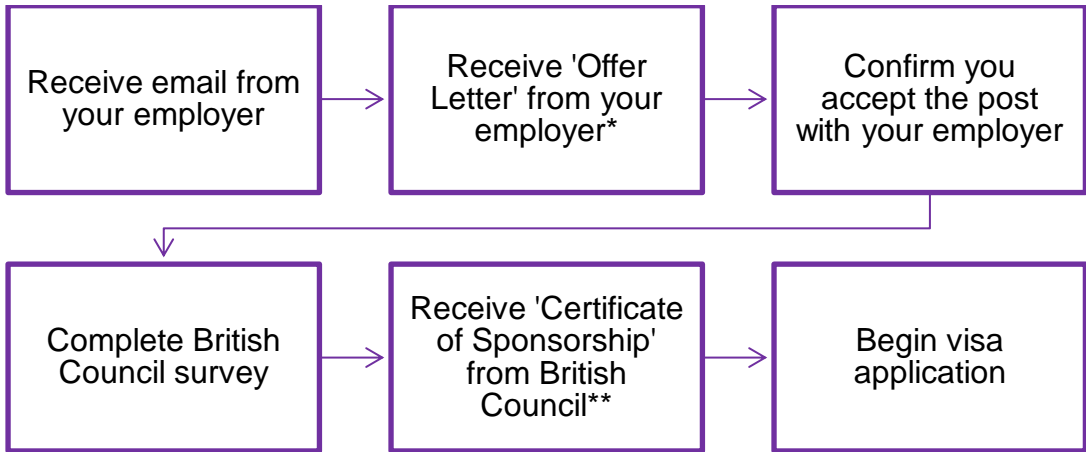
The British Council in the UK will act as the sponsor for this visa and will provide Language Assistants with the necessary paperwork and guidance in order to apply for this visa during the summer before posts commence.



Language Assistants should not attempt to begin their visa application before receiving guidelines from the British Council.

The first step is to hear from your employer (host institution or local authority) and receive a formal Offer Letter from them (*as explained in [section 1.4](#)*). The British Council will then contact you with further information and a survey to complete.

Steps required before applying for a visa:



*You should ensure that your name on the offer letter matches your exact name as it appears on your passport.

** Receiving a 'Certificate of Sponsorship from the British Council does not guarantee you will be granted entry clearance or permission. UK Visas and Immigration will make the final decision on this.

After you have made an [online visa application](#) for your **Temporary Work - Government Authorised Exchange visa**, you will need to confirm your identity.

How you do this depends on **where you're from** and **what type of passport you have**. You will either:

1. Have your fingerprints and photograph taken at a [visa application centre](#).
2. Use the 'UK Immigration: ID Check' app to scan your identity document - you'll also create or sign into your UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) account. You can find more information on how to use the app at the following website: [Using the 'UK Immigration: ID Check' app](#). There is also a useful video which may help you when using the app: [Top Tips for using the 'UK Immigration: ID Check' app for EU, EEA and Swiss citizens](#).

You'll be told what you need to do when you apply.

Assistants must take all relevant documentation to the appointment:

- your passport
- the Certificate of Sponsorship number
- any partner agency documentation
- Offer Letter from host institution
- any additional documents which the visa centre specifically requires

Visa processing times vary from country to country. It can take up to two months for Language Assistants to receive their visa and delays are common at certain times of year. If Assistants are experiencing delays in receiving their visas and think they may arrive in the UK later than expected, they should inform the British Council and their host institution as soon as possible.

Last year, approximately 81% of assistants received a decision on their visa application within 4 weeks, with 90% receiving a decision within 6 weeks. However, it is important that assistants apply for their visa as soon as they are instructed to do so by the British Council to avoid any unnecessary delays to their application.



Some Language Assistants may be required to undergo a test for pulmonary tuberculosis in order to get their visa. For further information, please consult the following website: [Tuberculosis tests for visa applicants](#).

Visa Costs

In order to apply for their visa, all assistants will be required to pay the visa application fee which is now £298. Depending on the length of their placement, assistants may also be asked to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge. It is therefore important for assistants to plan ahead financially in advance as they may need to pay a significant amount upon visa application.

2.2 Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS)

What is the IHS?

The Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS) is a **one-off payment** of £1,035 for anyone coming into the UK on a visa for **longer than six months**.

Please note that **the surcharge is not a visa fee**; the payment goes directly into the National Health Service (NHS), giving assistants on 'long posts' access to the NHS healthcare during your time in the UK.



We strongly recommend that **all** Language Assistants get comprehensive health insurance to cover any medical fees while you are in the UK, including emergency repatriation in the case of severe illness, accident, or death as this is not covered by the NHS. *Please see [section 3.4](#).*

When should assistants on a 'long post' pay the IHS?

Assistants must make the payment when applying for a visa or when booking a visa application appointment to submit their biometrics.

Anyone who does not pay the surcharge at this time will not be granted a visa, and applicants who pay the incorrect amount will experience significant delays in their visa application. It is therefore extremely important that Language Assistants read the [GOV.UK IHS guidelines](#) and the British Council visa guidelines very carefully before making their visa application.

After paying, you will be sent an IHS number via email. This will also be shown on screen when you have paid. Please keep this safe, as you will need to provide this at your biometric appointment.

Your host institution/local authority will reimburse the IHS fee of £1035 upon completion of the first month of your placement and a receipt is not required in order to receive this. Please note that assistants may have to pay National Insurance on this reimbursement of the IHS.

If assistants pay the IHS in their home currency, they will be charged an exchange rate which is based on the [OANDA exchange rate](#) on the date of payment +4%. This may mean that they will have paid slightly more in total than the amount they will receive in the reimbursement.

If they do not receive the reimbursement of the IHS after 1 month of employment, assistants should query this directly with their host institution. If assistants still do not receive the reimbursement, they should contact the British Council in order to rectify this as soon as possible.

I am an assistant on a short post, and I am being asked to pay the IHS as part of my visa application.

Assistants on 'short posts' are **not** required to pay the IHS as they are in the UK for under 6 months. If assistants partaking in a short post are prompted to pay the fee, it is important to check that their placement dates are not pushing them slightly over the six month mark.

A way to check this is with the [IHS Checker](#), which allows assistants to check whether or not they are required to pay the charge. If it states that an assistant must, due to the placement being slightly over 6 months, they may want to contact their school to rearrange their placement dates. If the checker states that an assistant does not have to pay the surcharge but they are still being prompted to do so through the visa process, they should [contact UKVI](#), providing a screenshot of the checker answer as proof.

2.3 Biometric Residence Permit (BRP)



If you confirmed your identity using the 'UK Immigration: ID Check' app, you will be informed if you will receive an eVisa instead of a visa vignette and BRP.

Please see [section 2.4](#) for more information on eVisas.

What is the BRP?

The BRP is a card which demonstrates your right to work in the UK. It includes your biometric information (photo and fingerprints) and the dates of your right to work in the UK.

In your visa application, you must name a [post office](#) in the UK where you will collect your BRP: this should be a post office close to your host institution and must have a BRP Card Collection Service available.

After applying for your visa, you will be given the following documents:

- a Biometric Identity Document (BID) decision letter which sets out the leave granted and explains how Language Assistants should collect the BRP
- a short-term visa (vignette) included as a page in their passport which allows you to enter the UK.



We strongly recommend that assistants regularly check official [UK government guidance on BRPs](#) throughout the summer, as visa information and processes can sometimes change at short notice.

Collecting your BRP

After arriving in the UK, you must collect your BRP card before your vignette expires or within 10 days of when you said you would arrive in the UK, whichever is later.

Do not collect your BRP if you are self-isolating because of coronavirus (COVID-19). The Post Office will keep your BRP for 60 days so you can collect it when you finish self-isolating.

Full information about the BRP and where to collect it can be found on the [GOV.UK Biometric Residence Permits website](#).

If an Assistant receives a visa vignette valid for the entirety of their assistantship (instead of the 30-day vignette), then they may not need to collect a BRP. Nonetheless, we strongly encourage

them to contact UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) directly to check this, as every case is different.

2.4 eVisa

If you confirmed your identity using the 'UK Immigration: ID Check' app and are informed that you can view your immigration status online, you will not receive a visa vignette or a BRP. Instead, you will use your UKVI account credentials to sign in to the View and Prove service on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk), where you can access your online immigration status information – this is called an eVisa.

You will then use the online service to prove your status to others, for example, your employer.

Further information can be found on the [GOV.UK View and prove your immigration status \(eVisa\) website](https://www.gov.uk/view-and-prove-your-immigration-status).

2.5 Visa start and end dates

It is the Language Assistant's responsibility to ensure that their visa vignette, BRP or eVisa is valid for the full duration of their assistantship, and to report any errors they think may have been made with their visa as soon as possible.

Under the Temporary Work – Government Authorised Exchange visa rules, Language Assistants may apply to enter the UK up to 14 days before the official Language Assistant appointment start date and apply to remain in the UK up to 14 days after the end date of the Language Assistant's contract. If the visa is significantly longer than this, the Language Assistant must contact the British Council immediately and we will advise you how to rectify the error.

Assistants should remember that the dates stated on their visa vignette, BRP or eVisa already include these additional up to 14 days prior to their contracted assistantship begins and up to 14 days after their assistantship ends. We therefore strongly advise that Language Assistants do not book their flights until they have received their visa.

Assistants can begin working in their host institution as soon as their visa validity period commences, even if this is before their contracted assistantship start date.

If you have any concerns about your visa application, please contact UK Visas and Immigration directly. The GOV.UK website provides [details on how to contact UKVI](#).



You should also keep your host institution informed of your visa application progress.

You must not enter the UK prior to the 'valid from' date on your visa or you will be asked to leave and re-enter at your own cost during the validity period of your visa.

2.6 Visa requirements: During the year

Right to Work Checks

As your visa sponsor, the British Council is required to keep certified copies of the passports and visas of Language Assistants.

Your employer (host institution / local authority) will need to photocopy and certify the following visa documents:

- Original passport
 - Front and back cover
 - Photo page
 - Visa page (if applicable)
- Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) – front and back / Online right to work check

You will be asked to sign and date the photocopy of the visa page of the passport too.

Other visa requirements

As your visa sponsor, the British Council is required to keep a record of the following details throughout the year:

- The date you enter the UK. If you do not receive a stamp on your passport, you should keep a copy or screenshot of your boarding pass or ticket as evidence of this.
- Updates to your contact details or address in the UK – [see section 5.1](#)
- The dates you will be travelling outside of the UK during your assistantship – [see section 5.7](#).
- Proof that you have left the Common Travel Area (CTA) on or before the date your visa expires – [see section 6.3](#).

3 Preparation before you go

3.1 Questions to ask

Once you hear from your host institution, you will have lots of questions for them! Important information will be included in your Offer Letter from them so check this first. There may be other things to confirm with them before you arrive.

Here are some questions you may want to ask your mentor teacher or host institution:

Contact details

- What are the contact details of my mentor teacher throughout the summer?
- What is the name, address, telephone number, and email address of the previous Language Assistant?

The British Council will send you contact details of former assistants in the UK during the summer, but your host institution may be able to give you details of their previous assistant.

Arrival

- When should I arrive in the UK?

Language Assistants will be expected to be at work on the start date stated in their contract. Language Assistants will need to arrive earlier than these dates (at least a week in advance is recommended) in order to settle in and, in most cases, secure accommodation. They should ensure they comply with the dates in their visa.

- How do I get to the host institution or my accommodation from the airport / station / port of arrival?

It may not be possible for someone to meet you when you first arrive in the UK, especially if arriving during the working day. If this is the case, you should ask your host institution for directions and local train stations and do some research online prior to arrival.

Accommodation

- Can my employer help me find accommodation, or give me advice?

Language Assistants should understand that finding accommodation is ultimately their own responsibility; however, host institutions are encouraged to advise Language Assistants about accommodation options in the local area or possible temporary accommodation (for example, in a hostel) in order to give Assistants time to find something more permanent. If the host institution has indicated that it is able to provide accommodation, Language Assistants should ask for the address and telephone number. *See [section 5.1](#).*

Host Institution details

- What is the address, telephone number, email, and website of the host institution?
- What type of institution(s) will I be working in?
- What are the term/holiday dates? Are there any staff training days I should be aware of?
- What is the social environment of the institution?
- How big is the institution? How many students?
- How many teachers? How many teachers of my language are there?
- How old are the students? What is the age-range and language level of the students I will be working with?
- Does the institution have any links with my country (i.e., a partner institution)?
- Can I bring any specific authentic materials from my country that I could put up in the classroom or use in lessons? [See section 3.3.](#)
- What type of clothing will I be expected to wear at work?
- What courses and qualifications are the students I will be working with preparing for? Can I read or prepare anything in advance to improve my understanding of the requirements for these courses and qualifications?



Listen to our [podcast about hearing from your host institution](#) for the first time, including tips on building your relationship with them.

Examinations at your home university

If Language Assistants must return to their home country at some point during the year to take examinations, they must:

- Inform their mentor teacher prior to their arrival in the UK.
- On arrival, show their mentor teacher the official request from their university.
- French Language Assistants may be able to take exams at the French Institute in London or Edinburgh and should enquire about this possibility before arranging to return home.



Host institutions should be sympathetic to reasonable requests by Language Assistants for time off to take examinations.

Language Assistants should ensure that they are absent for as little time as possible, and they should offer to make up any hours they might miss during their absence. If they make up the hours (work the same number of hours missed) once

they return, they should be paid the same as in a normal month where they are there all the time.

3.2 Police clearance from your home country

Some Language Assistants will have included a police certificate in their original application, sent to their employer by the British Council. If a police certificate has not been included, Language Assistants must apply for one from their country of origin and give it to their local authority or host institution on their first day (or earlier if requested). Please note that Language Assistants' police certificates should be dated within six months of presenting it to the host institution / local authority.



The police certificate is a very important document. Host institutions and local authorities must request this from their Language Assistant(s) as soon as possible.

If you have spent significant time in another country, you should check if your host institution will require an additional police check to account for your time there.

In order to work in school, you will also be required to do a UK police check when you arrive in the UK, and you should ask your employer what documents you will need for this.

See [section 4.5.3](#) for further information.

3.3 Resources to bring

One way of making language learning real for students is by bringing authentic materials into the classroom from a country where the target language is spoken. The more materials Language Assistants can bring with them, the better. Language Assistants should think about what worked well for themselves personally as a language student and which items they find interesting when in a foreign country.

There are a lot of authentic materials that will come in useful for lessons, such as:

- photographs – your house, street, town or village, region, family, pets
- maps – of your hometown and/or of countries where your language is an official language
- tourist information – hotels, campsites, monuments, price lists, opening and closing times, museum tickets, information on festivals, tourist brochures, and postcards
- music – popular and traditional
- easy-to-understand textbooks related to social themes or illustrating grammar points (for example, conditional tense)
- audio-visual aids – weather information, quiz shows, word games, soap operas (especially those known in the UK), adverts, cartoons

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- television/cinema listings and reviews
 - local newspapers, teen magazines, weather forecasts, minor news items, problem pages
 - board or card games
 - a school timetable or school report
 - transport timetables and tickets
 - real menus from restaurants, price lists from bars
 - empty packets – toothpaste, soup, chocolate, etc.

3.4 Money and Insurance

Savings

Language Assistants should make sure that they have access to enough money to live on (approximately £1000–£2,000 depending on the area) until they receive their first payment, which should arrive at the end of the first month but could arrive later. Assistants in the London area should prepare a greater amount of savings to compensate for the higher cost of living in this region. It is important that assistants plan financially well in advance to avoid difficulties later on. Budgeting is essential throughout the assistantship as this will help assistants to remain financially stable throughout their time in the UK.



Please note that it is not possible for Language Assistants with a Temporary Work – Government Authorised Exchange visa to claim benefits or any other assistance from the state.

Insurance



Listen to our [podcast about the importance of insurance](#).

- **Health insurance**

We strongly recommend all Language Assistants take out insurance which covers wider medical-related costs while in the UK, particularly assistants on ‘short posts’ as they are not entitled to NHS cover. An insurance policy may cover, for example:

- costs of returning home if a relative is ill
- costs of a relative visiting the UK if the Language Assistant falls ill
- cost of returning to their home country for treatment
- or, in the worst-case scenario, returning a body home for burial

Please note that there can be a long wait for certain NHS treatments in the UK, sometimes many months. An insurance policy which gives Language Assistants access to private medical care could give them much quicker access to the treatment they need. Language Assistants who already have medical insurance in their home country should check whether they can extend it to cover their stay in the UK, as well as looking at options available from UK insurers.

More information on healthcare in the UK is in [section 5.5](#).



Assistants on a 'long post' will pay the Immigration Health Surcharge as part of their visa application (*please see [section 2.2](#) for more information*). Although this entitles them to NHS treatment whilst in the UK, **we recommend that all assistants get comprehensive health insurance** to cover the additional costs mentioned above.

- **Travel insurance**

We strongly recommend Language Assistants take out personal travel insurance to provide cover for both themselves and their possessions (particularly personal items of value) for their journey to and from the UK and for their stay in the UK. This should also include cover for emergency medical repatriation and personal liability (civil responsibility).



The British Council is unable to recommend particular insurance policies or companies, and it is the Language Assistant's responsibility to investigate this themselves.

Assistants should check carefully if they can find insurance which includes COVID-19 as a cause of travel delay or expenses.

For travel tips please see [section 5.7](#).

- **Public and professional liability**



Language Assistants should be included in the employer's insurance policy for public and professional liability. Check this with your host institution/local authority.

Entitlement to home country benefits after your time in the UK

Before you leave for your time in the UK, Language Assistants should remember to check with the relevant authorities any queries about entitlement to medical insurance, healthcare or unemployment benefit in your own country following your employment in the UK.

3.5 Bringing personal belongings to the UK (including vehicles)

All Language Assistants should visit the [‘Moving personal belongings to the UK’ section of the GOV.UK website](#) for further information and guidance.

Language Assistants who wish to bring a car to the UK with them should consult the ‘Importing vehicles’ section for up-to-date information on how to do this legally. They should also familiarise themselves with [The Highway Code](#) as soon as possible.

4 Working in the UK

Most Language Assistants will be working in secondary schools; however, some will be working in primary schools and a small number in sixth form colleges, universities, or colleges of further education. A variety of schools host Language Assistants, including different types of state school and independent schools. You can ask your host institution for further information about the type of institution you are working in.

Some schools employ their Language Assistants to help the most able students prepare for university entry-level examinations; others employ them to help prepare for oral examinations of the relevant school-leaving qualifications. The role of the Assistant is to make language learning more interactive and fun, whatever level they end up teaching, and to build students' confidence in communicating in the target language.

4.1 UK Education Sector

The four devolved nations of the United Kingdom each have their own education system. We recommend that Language Assistants familiarise themselves with the relevant system.

- **England:** [The National Curriculum in England](#)
- **Northern Ireland:** [The Northern Ireland Curriculum](#)
- **Scotland:** [Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland](#)
- **Wales:** [Curriculum for Wales](#)

Please see [Appendix 2](#) for a comparison of different stages of the curriculum across the UK.

If you have any questions about the specific curriculum, courses and qualifications in your host institution, we advise asking for further information during the summer as you prepare for the role.



Smoking is banned in all public places in the UK. This usually includes the area immediately outside school buildings.

4.2 Who will I work with?

Mentor teacher – You should be given a mentor teacher. They are usually a teacher in the languages department who will meet with you regularly to help you progress in your role and support you with any challenges you may have, both professionally and personally (within reason).

Languages department colleagues – Assistants are also likely to work with other teachers in the department on a regular basis. Language teachers may wish to talk to Language Assistants in their own language for practice.

Other colleagues - Your mentor teacher should introduce you to key staff in your institution: the head teacher, deputy head, institution secretary, bursar/finance officer, principal teacher of Modern Languages or faculty head, and other teachers.

You should also be advised who to contact within your host institution, aside from your mentor teacher, if you have concerns about your wellbeing. Not all host institutions will have a psychologist or counsellor employed within the institution but should be able to direct you to an organisation or person.

We encourage Assistants to stay in the staffroom occasionally when they have free periods between lessons as they may meet teachers of all subjects. Having lunch with staff members will also provide the opportunity for social chat. Tell your colleagues if you have particular interests or would like to get involved in local activities – they may know of things going on that they could invite you to. Teachers in the UK tend to be very busy and don't always have a lot of time to chat between lessons, but if Language Assistants make the effort, it is usually easy to make friends at work.

As a Language Assistant you have the same status in your host institution as any other member of staff and should be treated accordingly.

4.3 Induction

4.3.1 Mentor teacher

Your mentor teacher should meet with you to discuss employer policies, department priorities, the curriculum and what is expected of you in your role as a Language Assistant. This should help avoid misunderstandings and encourage co-operation with staff.

To help find your way around, you can ask for a plan of the buildings or to be shown around the institution, even areas where you might not normally teach. You may wish to ask your mentor teacher where you can make photocopies for your classes and if there is a display board you could use to show work you have been doing with students.

Your mentor teacher should also explain what the institution's policy is on disruptive or aggressive behaviour. This will ensure that any action you take is understood by the students and supported by your employer. If one child is very disruptive in your class, the usual teacher for that class should be able to advise and support you appropriately. You are a member of staff and deserve the same status and respect as other teachers.

You should make sure to have regular communication with your mentor teacher. This will help you to develop a good working rapport throughout the academic year.

4.3.2 Observing classes

Before you begin to work closely with students, you should be given the opportunity to observe the class teacher. Observation will allow you to experience classroom management techniques as well as to get to know the names, faces, and personalities of your students.

You should note the following:

- how the teacher starts and ends the lesson
- how much the target language is used
- what the teacher's attitude is to student errors and correction
- how the teacher controls behaviour, lateness, and lack of effort
- how the teacher speaks to students
- how the teacher involves all students in the class activity

4.3.3 Timetable



All Language Assistants must receive a fixed timetable for their classes by their third week at work.

Most timetables are weekly, but some may be for 10-day (i.e., two-week) periods. The Language Assistant's timetable has to fit in with the rest of the institution timetable, so although host institutions may try to arrange for the Language Assistant to have one free day during the working week, this cannot be guaranteed.



When agreeing sharing arrangements and timetables, host institutions / local authorities should try to ensure that travel between institutions does not become unreasonable for the Language Assistant.

Where possible, assistants will not be timetabled at multiple institutions on the same day. However, if this cannot be avoided then your employer should cover your travel expenses between the institutions.

4.4 Settling into your role

4.4.1 Lesson Planning

In class, a good first impression will help, and you should try to establish yourself from the start as a well-organised, professional, and motivated member of the staff team.



Listen to our [Preparing to Teach podcast episode](#) for tips to help you get started.

Ask your mentor teacher:

- about the type of qualifications your students are preparing for and do some research. There is usually lots of information on the qualification authority’s website, as well as past exam papers.
- for copies of the course books as these could help to develop linked topics.
- about the procedure for using equipment for your lessons to give them more variety (CD/DVD player, television, computer, overhead projector, or interactive whiteboard).
- if they have any subscriptions to accounts for teaching resources which they can share with you.

Showing YouTube videos and listening to podcasts can be a great way to engage your students and help them discover the contemporary culture of your home country.

Here are some resources to inspire you at the start. Remember to put your own spin on them to bring languages to life for your students!

Teaching materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British Council teaching materials • TES resources • Twinkl • Quizlet
Games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kahoot!
Content creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canva • Genially

If you use Twitter, have a look at the **#MFLtwitterati** community which can also be a good source of inspiration and support.

Please see [Appendix 3](#) for information on Cultural Institutes and Professional Associations in which provide resources and events to promote the teaching and learning of languages in the UK.



If you wish to select discussion topics with political, religious, or sexual aspects, you must ask your mentor teacher for advice before introducing the material in the classroom. *Please see [section 4.5](#) for more information on safeguarding.*

4.4.2 Get involved in activities or trips

Helping with sports days, theatre/music productions, or Modern Language societies will help you to meet other members of staff and engage with students outside of language lessons. Language Assistants should try to go to institution ‘open days’, fairs, or parent evenings, as these are also a good way of meeting people. Often there are organised trips to theatres and other towns in which Language Assistants could easily be included.



Insurance for such trips must be looked into as Assistants may not be fully covered by their host institution's insurance policy.

Assistants in previous years have taken part in activities such as:

- The school choir
- Playing football after school with colleagues
- Organising a language club or pen pal exchange
- Giving a yoga class for colleagues and students
- Taking part in a dance club to share traditional dance from their count
- It is a good idea for language assistants to speak with their mentor teacher and school community when they arrive in order to find out about activities they could get involved in and how they can make the most of their assistantship in the UK.

4.5 Safeguarding (also known as Child Protection)

The UK has some of the strictest safeguarding laws in the world. Language Assistants are encouraged to make themselves aware of important issues regarding safeguarding under the relevant UK nation's legislation.

- **England and Wales:** [Department for Education \(DfE\) website](#) – The Children Act 1989
- **Northern Ireland:** [Department of Education Northern Ireland website](#) – The Children (NI) Order 1995.
- **Scotland:** [Scottish Government website](#) – The Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003

4.5.1 Host institution policy

Language Assistants must be sensitive to cultural differences at all times and must be aware that some types of behaviour may be seen as unusual or inappropriate in a school context. Comments or gestures that are intended to be funny may cause offence and, exceptionally, may even be seen as threatening violence or constituting sexual harassment. They must take care that they do not behave in a way that could be misinterpreted by students or staff. Any complaint will be taken very seriously; if any accusations were to be made against a Language Assistant, it could end in dismissal or even a court hearing.



It is your employer's responsibility to explain what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate interactions with students. You should ask your mentor teacher for a copy of the relevant policies and training.

Remember that safeguarding laws can also apply to situations outside of the classroom, for example, on school buses or at private parties. Although Language Assistants can be polite and friendly if they see students outside of work, they should remember to remain professional at all times and not put themselves in any situations that could be misconstrued.

4.5.2 Use of internet and social media

Language Assistants are encouraged and expected to use the internet for professional purposes, and they can usually do so at work. However, they should check with their mentor when they can and cannot use the internet.

You should familiarise yourself with your institution's policy on the use of computers and be aware of any restrictions on access to certain internet sites or on the content of emails sent from host institution computers. Assistants should be aware that accessing pornographic and other unsuitable sites could result in disciplinary action.

If you want to get students involved in online work, you should ask for advice from teachers before doing so, ensure that you follow the institution's acceptable usage policy and that teachers are kept informed throughout the project.

Assistants should be very careful about how they use social networking sites while they are a Language Assistant on the programme.

- Keep your profile private so that it can only be viewed by people you intend to view it.
- Consider changing your profile name so you are more difficult to find.
- Always remain professional in what you say on social media.

Language Assistants should never swap personal contact details with students, invite them to be 'friends', or accept similar invitations from them, as this is likely to be regarded as inappropriate behaviour and could lead to disciplinary action.

4.5.3 Police clearance – from the UK authorities

As well as supplying a police certificate from your home country, Language Assistants must also obtain police clearance from the UK authorities. A criminal record check must therefore be carried out by the Language Assistant's employer (host institution or local authority) as soon as possible after their arrival.

The type of criminal record check which will be carried out will vary depending on which UK country the Language Assistants have been allocated to.

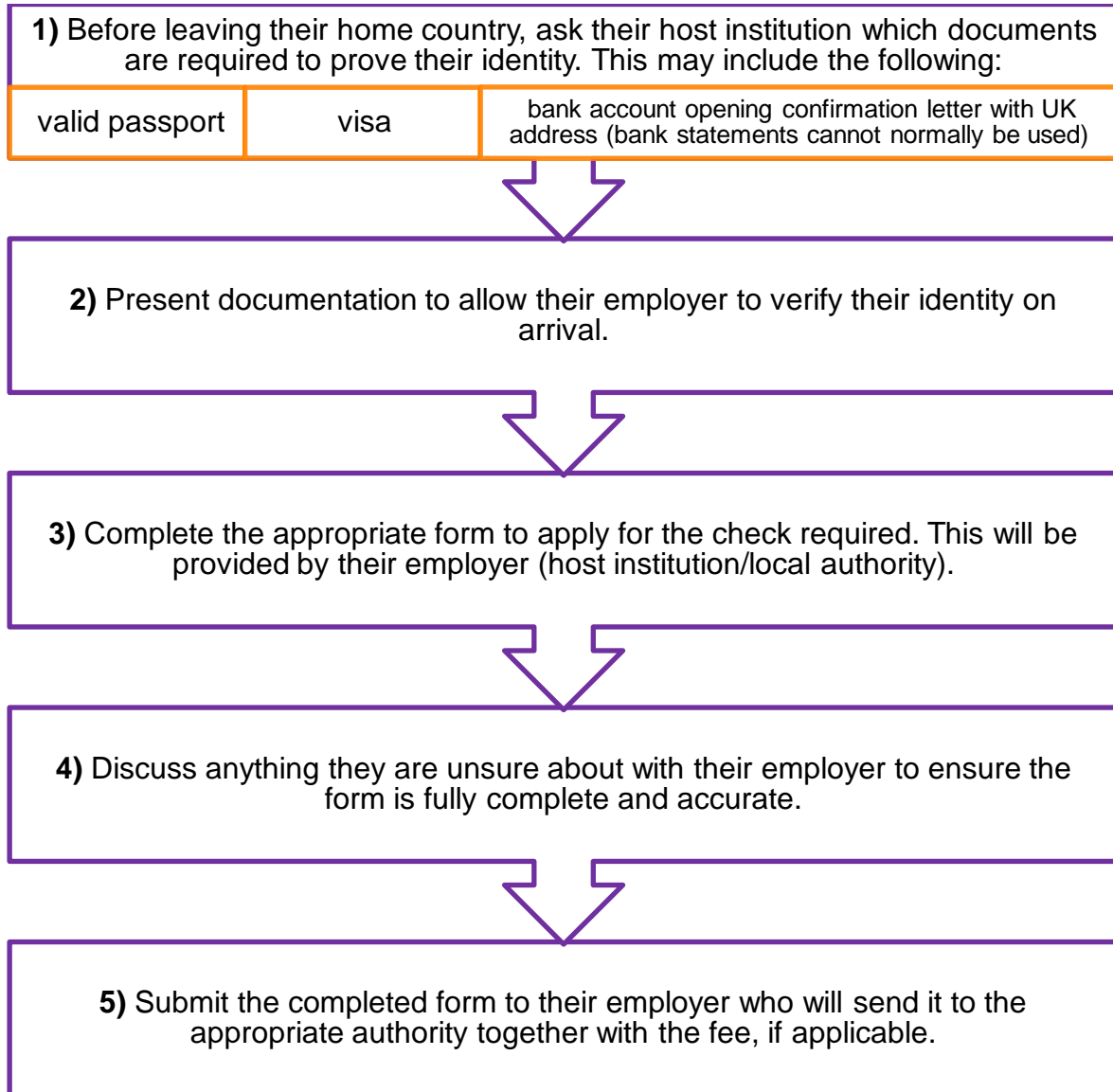
- **England and Wales:** Enhanced DBS with children's barred list, Disclosure and Barring Service
- **Northern Ireland:** Criminal history disclosure, Access NI
- **Scotland:** Membership of the PVG (Protection of Vulnerable Groups) Scheme, Disclosure Scotland

It is an offence for an organisation to knowingly offer work in a childcare position to anyone who is on the children's barred list. For this reason, it is important for Language Assistants to comply with any requests from their employer and to provide the necessary information for this criminal record check. This applies to all Language Assistants, regardless of whether or not they have a history of previous residence in this country.



The responsible body is the host institution/local authority, not the British Council.

Language Assistants should:



- **For assistants in England and Wales only:**

Documents: Only original documents can be used for the identity verification check. Photocopies are not acceptable unless certified by a [notary public \(full list can be found on the Notaries Society website\)](#). Your host institution will be able to provide more information on documents required, and if a translation is necessary.

Proof of address: If you do not currently have a permanent address in the UK, you may wish to discuss with your mentor teacher or HR contact providing your host institution’s address as a ‘care of’ address on the application form as well as your most recent address history in your application as detailed below. It is at the discretion of your host institution as to whether their address can be used in your application. You may also wish to consider providing the address of a family member or friend in the UK as a ‘care of’ address if you are unable to use your host institution’s address.

If you have a current permanent UK address, you will need to obtain proof of that address. The document required to show the address could be a letter from the head teacher (at the host institution) on headed paper, confirming the Language Assistant's address on the basis of a letter from the landlord. The document could also be a statement or document from a bank (including online banks) with proof of UK address. Previous Language Assistants have informed us that they were able to open an online bank account and generate a document to prove their UK address straight away.

- **For assistants in Scotland only:**

Applications may be submitted before arriving at your placement as documents required for membership of the PVG scheme can be viewed by your host institution via video call or copies can be sent via email.

You will receive two certificates once your application has been processed for membership of the PVG scheme. One is issued to the current address of the applicant (the assistant), and one is sent to the employer (the host institution) who submits the application. The assistant's copy cannot be sent to their host institution's address, as the host institution cannot receive both copies.

It is always best for assistants to ensure they have a copy of their certificate for their own records, so their copy must be sent to their current address. If assistants would rather wait until they are in Scotland to ensure they receive their copy this can be done but it should be noted that the application process will take a minimum of 14 days from the applicant submitting their section.

If the employing organisation uses the online system and receives results via email, the applicant's copy will also be sent via email.

Any queries can be sent to: response@disclosurescotland.gov.scot

- **For assistants in Northern Ireland only:**

When applying for the Access NI check, you should provide the address where you have lived for the previous 5 years or address history if you have had more than 1 address during that time. This will allow full police checks to be carried out, if required, with the relevant police organisations where you have lived.

You can provide a known or nominated address, such as your host institution if agreed, for delivery of the certificate (if hard copy) within Northern Ireland, however, most application certificates are sent to the applicant by e-mail. You must then share your certificate with your host institution also by email.

Before you travel to the UK, your host institution may carry out the initial identity check via an online video call; however, you must also send copies of your identity documents to your host institution to allow the application to proceed. Before beginning work, your host institution should then carry out a follow-up face to face identity check where your original documents can be examined. A follow-up check should also be carried out when a proof of

address in Northern Ireland becomes available. These documents must be retained for the duration of your assistantship.

Important information regarding UK criminal records checks for all assistants

- **Details of previous addresses:** Language Assistants must provide (but not prove) all addresses where they have lived in the last five years, ensuring that there are no gaps in the dates between addresses. An application that has gaps in the dates between addresses will be rejected.
- **National Insurance Number: It is not mandatory information** since Language Assistants may not have a permanent National Insurance number at the start of the academic year. Your employer may wish to attach a note to your application to explain this.
- **Cost:** The host institution / local authority should cover the cost of the criminal record check for their Language Assistant(s).



Criminal records checks in the UK can take some time to process.

You can usually work with classes under supervision until the check comes through. If this is not possible, the Assistant could be used to prepare materials/resources or support teachers in other ways; however, they must be paid for the duration of their contract, regardless of whether the check is in place.

4.6 Opening a bank account

You will need a UK bank account to be paid, so you must open one as soon as possible after your arrival.



Check with your host institution if they can pay you into an online bank account. These can be easier to open, although you should confirm with the provider if you are eligible to have your UK wages paid into it.

You must also ensure you open the bank account using your UK address. Some online banks may be able to provide you with a proof of address directly after opening the account.

Opening a traditional bank account can be a difficult process, as you are regarded as short-term clients. You should ask your mentor teacher if they know what bank their previous Language Assistant held an account with.

You should bring the following documentation with you to open a bank account:

- your passport and ID card

-
- your Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) / UKVI share code
 - a letter of introduction from the local authority or host institution. The letter of introduction should be on headed paper and if possible, addressed to the specific bank and branch concerned.

The letter of introduction should confirm:

- the name, address and telephone number of a contact person who is responsible for the Language Assistant (for example the person writing the letter, most likely the mentor teacher)
- the Language Assistant's name, address in their home country, address in the UK (even if a temporary address, such as a hostel), their position as a Language Assistant, details of place of work and conditions of employment.

The British Council has been told that the above documents will normally be enough to open bank accounts with major UK-based banks. If a colleague can accompany you when you first visit the bank, this may be helpful.

Take with you as much information as you have available: any other documentation, such as your lease (if you have already moved into accommodation), birth certificate, photographic driving licence, a letter or recent statement from their bank at home, at least one proof of address or even their British Council Certificate of Registration. Banks will normally only accept original documents, not copies.

Please note that a decision on what is acceptable is often at the discretion of the individual branch.

Getting paid

As soon as you open a bank account, you must give your account details to the person in your host institution or local authority who is in charge of staff pay. This may be a colleague working in human resources (HR) or the bursar. They will be able to let you know when to expect your first payment. If you do not receive a salary payment at the end of your first month working at your host institution, please inform us directly as soon as possible.

Language Assistants will usually be paid once a month and will receive a payslip that shows their gross allowance (before deductions) and net allowance (after deductions). If you work in more than one institution, you should receive full payment from the main host institution or local authority.

Language Assistants should remember to keep their payslips for reference in case they have any queries about pay or the deductions made. Language Assistants may also need them in the future to prove to their home authorities – for pension purposes – that they spent a year working in the UK.

4.7 Salary deductions

4.7.1 Pension

Language Assistants are eligible for membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) and will **automatically** be enrolled into the scheme through the payroll section of their employer. **However, they have the right to opt out of the scheme.**

If Language Assistants join the scheme, they will have money deducted from their salary each month as contributions towards their pension.

The employer must give the Language Assistant a guide to the LGPS. Host institutions should discuss the pension scheme with the assistant upon arrival. If the Language Assistant does not wish to join the scheme, they must inform their host institution directly as soon as possible when they arrive. If the Language Assistant does not wish to join the scheme, **they must complete an opting-out form prior to their first month's payroll run.** If they join, they can opt out of membership and receive a refund of contributions provided they opt out within two years. A guide to the LGPS, together with the relevant membership forms should be sent to the Language Assistant with their Offer Letter or given to them with their Statement of Employment.

4.7.2 Tax



Please do not call the British Council with regard to tax enquiries, as we cannot give advice on how your personal circumstances will affect your tax.

For data protection reasons, the tax offices will only speak to the individual involved so Language Assistants must call them directly – no one else can do this for you.

The following information is a brief introduction to tax deductions to expect from your monthly salary. For any queries about tax payments, you should contact HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) directly or contact your employer's tax office.

- [Contact HMRC about Income Tax](#)
- [Contact HMRC about National Insurance](#)

Income Tax

Most Language Assistants should be exempt from paying income tax on their standard salary, as they will earn below the 'tax-free Personal allowance' in each financial year.

This tax-free allowance covers one financial year (April – March). The academic year covers two financial years. The GOV.UK website has [information on income tax rates](#).

Assistants in London may have to pay a small amount of income tax as the London supplement can sometimes take their salary over the tax-free allowance. However, assistants only pay tax on the amount they earn above this.

Please note that Language Assistants may still be eligible to pay tax in their home country.

New Starter Checklist

Language Assistants must complete the New Starter Checklist as soon as possible after arrival in the UK to ensure they are issued with the correct tax code from HMRC. The Language Assistant's local authority or host institution will have the forms, not the British Council. The completed form gives the UK tax authorities information about who the Language Assistants are and whether they should pay tax or not.

Language Assistants may be subject to tax (emergency tax) in the first month or two as it takes time for their New Starter Checklist to be processed. They should receive a refund with their next salary (usually in December). If the Language Assistant continues to be subject to emergency tax (usually indicated by tax codes OT or BR), they must speak with their employer to rectify this.

It is also important for Language Assistants to check their tax codes in April, as they may change with the beginning of the new tax year. If so, Language Assistants must speak with their employer to rectify this.

Double Taxation Agreement

To our knowledge, the following countries have a Double Taxation Agreement with the UK which covers Modern Language Assistant under a relevant Teacher's Article:

- [France](#)
- [Germany](#)

A full [list of double taxation agreements](#) between the UK and other countries can be found on the HMRC website. It is the responsibility of each Language Assistant to do their own research on if this applies to them. If Language Assistants do any teaching work in the UK after this time, they will start paying tax and will also have to pay the tax back for their first two years. In addition, if they have worked in the UK before, or if they have been living outside their home country for a long time, they may have to pay income tax anyway.

Language Assistants from eligible countries should complete the British Council [double taxation agreement covering letter](#) for HMRC and attach the relevant agreement (with Teacher's Article) to the completed New Starter Checklist and return it to their employer. The Language Assistant should keep a photocopy of the completed form and accompanying letter in case of a future query regarding a possible tax refund.

National Insurance (NI)

National Insurance is the UK equivalent of social security in other countries. Every employee in the UK has to pay National Insurance and this applies to Language Assistants too. Language assistants are liable to pay National Insurance which is deducted from their monthly allowance. The amount deducted for Language Assistants based in London is usually higher due to the higher salary.

If Language Assistants have any problems understanding their NI payments, they should speak to their employer. The amount deducted for National Insurance each month will be visible on your payslip.

For assistants on long posts, assistants will be liable to have National Insurance deducted from the reimbursement of the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS).

You may already have a NI number.



- **Assistants with a UK visa:** The back of your BRP may already show a NI number, included under 'Remarks'. If so, you can use this straight away and there is no need to apply for one.

- **Assistants who have worked in the UK before:** Your NI number is valid for life so if you have previously worked in the UK, you should use the same number again for your time as a Language Assistant.

Applying for a NI number

If you do not have a NI number, you will need to apply for one as soon as possible on starting work as it can take up to 8 weeks to arrange. You will need to provide an address and cannot use a temporary accommodation address. You will also need to provide details of any addresses you have previously lived in. You will be issued with a card showing a unique number, which your employer needs in order to offer you work, and which ensures that the Language Assistant does not pay too much tax on their wages. As soon as you receive your NI number, make sure the relevant person or people in your institution have it.



Your employer should not give you a temporary NI Number as this cannot be used on the HM Revenue and Customs online tax return system.

Language Assistants working in a local authority should check with their local authority coordinator to see if a group booking has been arranged for them in their area in order to obtain a NI number.

If applying as an individual, more information on [How to Apply for a NI number](#) can be found on GOV.UK.

4.7.3 Registration fee (only applicable to Language Assistants in Wales)

Language Assistants in Wales are required to register with the Education Workforce Council and pay a one-off fee of £15 at the start of the assistantship. Your host institution will advise you on how to register and pay this fee.

5 Living in the UK

The UK is a very diverse country. Most big cities have a multicultural population and a lot of people do not have English as a first language. Cities are usually lively with a lot to do but are often expensive to live in and can be impersonal at times. Smaller towns are usually cheaper to live in and often easier to make friends in. The UK is quite densely populated, so even in a small town, it is usually possible to reach a larger place quite easily unless you live in a very rural place.



Find out more about the different [benefits of rural and city life in our podcast](#).

Visit the British Council's [StudyUK website for more information on life in the UK](#).

Additionally, Language Assistants should ask their colleagues if there are 'cheap days' for activities in their area; for example, cinemas are often cheaper mid-week.

Several shops and supermarket chains offer loyalty cards which may prove useful.



It is illegal to carry a CS gas canister (i.e., pepper spray or similar) in the UK, even for personal protection, as it is legally classified as an offensive weapon.

5.1 Finding Accommodation

Language Assistants are ultimately responsible for finding accommodation themselves. Your host institution may be able to give advice on the most suitable areas to live and where it may be best to avoid, transport links, and approximate rental prices. Sometimes they will know of a room available locally or have on-site accommodation, but this is not the case for all institutions and should not be expected. We recommend checking with your host institution as soon as you are in contact with them.



Listen to our [podcast about finding accommodation](#).

We recommend that Language Assistants plan their arrival in the UK so that they have time to find suitable accommodation. It may be easier to move into temporary accommodation in the short term. Organisations such as [HOST](#) may allow Assistants to stay with UK residents for the initial days or a weekend upon arrival.

Language Assistants can also try the following:

- ask the institution's previous Language Assistant(s) if they can offer any advice
- ask around at work and advertise on the staff notice board
- check university, college or other student notice boards locally

- look online on websites like [Gumtree](#), [SpareRoom](#) (previous Language Assistants recommend posting your own ad), [Roomgo](#), [Rightmove](#), [Zoopla](#), [Airbnb](#) and [Homestay](#)
- contact local estate agencies directly*
- keep in touch with other assistants in your area using the Buddy Maps as you may be able to find accommodation together
- check for adverts for homestays in the local area or local families who may wish to host a Language Assistant

*Some estate agencies may require a UK guarantor for rental properties.

Information about renting privately is on the [Citizen's Advice Bureau website](#) – remember to select the UK nation in which you are living.

If you are unsure about the area, consider asking someone from your host institution to accompany you when your first visit the property. It is important to research the area thoroughly and not travel to areas where you are concerned about your safety.

If you have previously lived in the UK, consider bringing references from previous landlords.



Language Assistants must make sure they do not arrange accommodation too far away as travel could be expensive; host institutions and local authorities will not pay for transport costs between accommodation and your workplace

Where local public transport is limited, it may be possible for colleagues to consider offering lifts to or from work if you live nearby, but you should not depend on this.

Language Assistants should **not**:

- advertise telephone numbers in public places
- sign any contract with an agency without finding out if there are any fees to pay
- sign any contracts or pay any money until they have seen the property in person
- take adverts on social media sites at face value as many could be scams

Moving in

When signing a rental agreement, please be aware of the notice period given. It is recommended to include a 'diplomatic clause' in the rental agreement to allow for a shorter notice period in the event that the rental agreement needs to be terminated prematurely due to force majeure (including in the event of a pandemic or a travel warning officially issued by the government). This is advised particularly in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

If living in a house with a family or renting someone's room while they are away for a few months, Assistants will probably not have to provide their own bedding and cutlery, pots and pans, etc. However, if renting a room in a shared house with other Assistants, students, or workers, they will probably have to provide their own. It is best to check this before moving in.

When moving into long-term accommodation it is normal in the UK to pay a deposit to your landlord which usually amounts to at least one month's rent. Some assistants have cited having to pay more than one month's rent initially so we recommend bringing adequate savings to cover at least two months' rent. We recommend that you take photographs of the room and the flat when you move in. This is to help retrieve your deposit when you end your tenancy, which is usually dependent on the accommodation being in the same condition as when the tenant first arrived.

Visa requirements: Updates to your contact details

As a requirement of your UK visa, you must inform the British Council if you change address or contact details, using an online form which the British Council will send shortly after Language Assistants arrive in the UK.

5.2 Council Tax

Council Tax is a property tax based on both the value of the property (house or flat) and the number of adults living there. Language Assistants are exempt from paying Council Tax as they are regarded as a student for Council Tax purposes when enrolled on the British Council programme. For all other aspects, Language Assistants have the status of a paid employee of the host institution.



Council Tax is not applicable to Language Assistants based in Northern Ireland.

No one in the Language Assistant's property should be required to pay Council Tax, provided everyone living there is a student or a British Council Language Assistant. If the Language Assistant lives with anyone who is employed, the household will be liable to pay Council Tax and a Council Tax bill will be sent to the property.

We will send every Language Assistant a British Council Certificate of Registration in their first month of employment so that they can prove their status as a Language Assistant as well as their exemption from paying Council Tax during the period of their employment. Language Assistants may need to show this certificate to their landlord or send it to their local Council Tax office if they receive a letter from them demanding Council Tax payment.

If Language Assistants rent property before their assistantship contract starts or after it finishes, they will be liable to pay Council Tax for any days outside the exact dates of their contract.



If Language Assistants have any queries about Council Tax when they are in the UK, they should ask their employer for the address of the local Council Tax office, where they can go for further advice.

You may also wish to consult the [Citizens Advice website](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/) and select the UK nation in which you are living.

5.3 Registering with your embassy

You may also want to register with your home country's embassy in the UK, who will have up to date information on your country and sometimes plan events. The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) website has [details of foreign embassies in the UK](#).

5.4 Health

5.4.1 Registering with your local NHS health centre

All Language Assistants should register with a local NHS health centre (GP) as soon as they arrive in the UK as it can take a number of weeks depending on the centre. Staff at the host institution may be able to recommend where to go.

It is at the discretion of individual GPs whether they accept new patients. Most clinics have a website with information on how to register and a link to any forms to bring with you. You should telephone in advance to confirm:

- your address is in the clinic's catchment area
- you are in the UK on a Temporary Work: Government Authorised Exchange visa
- what documents you need to bring with you

Language Assistants may need to prove their identity and work status, so it is a good idea to take the following documents:

- your passport and ID card
- your Biometric Residence Permit (BRP)/ access to View and Prove service
- formal Offer Letter and Statement of Employment from your host institution

5.4.2 Treatment

Always take your BRP with you or ensure you have access to the View and Prove service when you need healthcare.

Language Assistants with [pre-settled status](#) or those on 'long posts' who have paid the IHS are entitled to NHS treatment for their mental and physical health on the same basis as UK nationals. However, like other UK citizens (and depending on which part of the UK they are posted to), they may have to pay for the following:

- prescriptions (each item on a prescription costs £9.65 in England, but is free in Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland)
- dental treatment (note: it can be difficult to register with a dentist that will provide NHS treatment, which is less costly than private dentistry services, so we strongly advise Language Assistants to have a dental check-up and any follow-up treatment in their home country prior to travelling to the UK)

- eye care or treatment, purchasing contact lenses or glasses



Assistants on ‘short posts’ will be required to pay for all NHS services as they have not paid the IHS.

We strongly recommend that **all** Language Assistants get comprehensive health insurance to cover any medical fees while you are in the UK, including emergency repatriation in the case of severe illness, accident, or death as this is not covered by the NHS. *Please see [section 3.4](#).*

All Language Assistants receive free emergency treatment.

5.4.3 Looking after your mental health

Even if Language Assistants have been to the UK before, it is possible that they will find some things strange at first and will need a little time to settle in. Assistants should tell people if they have any problems or if they need information, and mentor teachers and other colleagues should make sure they are approachable and willing to help where possible. Language Assistants should try to accept invitations to places and activities as much as possible as they might meet new friends and gain new interests.

Find out more about how to access [mental health support in the UK](#) on the UKCISA website.



Listen to our [Wellbeing podcast episode](#) for ways to support positive mental health when moving abroad.

5.4.4 Sick Leave and Statutory Sick Pay

Every Language Assistant is entitled to [Statutory Sick Pay \(SSP\)](#) from the start of their employment if they fall ill. It is at the discretion of the school as to whether the Language Assistant would be entitled to any additional contractual benefits, and these must be stated in the Statement of Employment provided to the Assistant prior to beginning their employment.



The Assistant’s mentor teacher should explain what the procedure is regarding absence in the case of illness and when a doctor’s certificate would be required.

Language Assistants must telephone their institution to inform them as soon as possible if they are sick.

The amount the Language Assistant would receive on Statutory Sick Pay is significantly below their monthly allowance and is unlikely to cover the living costs of a Language Assistant. It is therefore expected that a Language Assistant will return home if they are ill for an extended period. Assistants should check any arrangements for sick pay with their host institution before returning home.

If a Language Assistant must return home for any reason during the year, they must ask permission from the host institution or local authority.

Please see [section 6](#) for more information on what to do when you leave the UK.

5.5 Emergency contacts

Whilst in the UK, Language Assistants should use the following contact numbers in emergency situations.

Police/ Ambulance/ Fire Service (emergency): 999

Police (non-emergency): 101

NHS (non-emergency): 111

5.6 Studying or working part-time

As a Language Assistant, you have lots of time to immerse yourself in your local community.

Language Assistants must remember that their schoolwork, timetable, and role as a British Council Language Assistant must take priority. Assistants must not commit themselves to any additional activities until they have a fixed timetable at their institution(s).

Part-time study

Local colleges and universities often offer part-time courses which are a great way to meet new people and practise your English. You could even ask your mentor teacher if you can attend other classes in subjects that are of interest to you at your host institution.

If you are particularly interested in continuing to improve your English level whilst in the UK, speak with colleagues in your host institution to find out if there are any courses running in the local area. You may also be interested in taking the [Cambridge English exams](#)

Other work

Language Assistants who are in the UK on a visa sponsored by the British Council can only take on additional work if they are working in jobs related to teaching (e.g., working with children or translating) or a job which is in an occupation listed in the [Immigration Salary List](#). The additional work they take on cannot exceed 20 hours, and the Language Assistant must provide the British Council with all the details of any additional work in writing.

Language assistants should advise their new employer that the employment is supplementary to the work they are being sponsored to do, so their supplementary employer can make the necessary checks on their Right to Work in the UK.



Listen to our [podcast about how to improve your own language skills](#) during your time as an assistant.

Those who do not require a visa to come to the UK may be able to supplement their income by giving private lessons or by doing a part-time job.

Taking on additional work may affect the amount of tax you pay. Assistants with second jobs should contact HMRC to ask for their non-taxable allowance to be split between the two jobs. [See section 4.7.2 for more information on tax.](#)



Please note it is not possible for Language Assistants with a Temporary Work – Government Authorised Exchange visa to do voluntary work in the UK.

5.7 Travel

Language Assistants will have half-term holidays as well as around two weeks' holiday in December/January (Christmas) and March/April (Easter); ask your host institution for the exact dates. The holidays can be an opportunity to explore the UK and the following websites are a good place to start planning travels:

- [Rough Guide to Accessible Britain](#)
- [VisitBritain website](#)

Coach (long-distance bus) travel is cheaper than rail, but Language Assistants can get cheaper rail tickets by booking in advance. If you are aged 16-26 you can buy a [National Express Young Persons Coachcard](#) which will save you money.

Rail travel is usually more expensive at peak times from Monday to Friday, but some Assistants may be entitled to buy a railcard. Please visit the [railcard website](#) for more information on the different railcards available.

For assistants in Northern Ireland, you can find out more about discounts and travel card options for bus and rail on the [Translink](#) website.

For assistant in Scotland, you can find out more about railcard options on the [ScotRail](#) website. Language Assistants working in Scotland aged 26 and under may be interested in [Young Scot](#) membership also.

Visa requirements: Travelling outside of the UK during the assistantship

As your visa sponsor, the British Council is required to keep a record of the dates that Language Assistants will be travelling outside of the UK during their assistantship.

Language Assistants who are planning on travelling abroad must inform the British Council in advance, using an online survey which the British Council will send shortly before Language Assistants arrive in the UK.

It is the Language Assistant's responsibility to ensure they have the correct visa for the countries they are visiting before they travel. The British Council is unable to advise on this, so you should investigate this before you travel. You should also buy travel insurance to cover your trips.

Europe – Schengen Visa

Language Assistants from a non-EU country who are considering travel to other European countries should apply for a Schengen Visa, which allows travel to 15 European countries on a single visa. There is more information available on the [Schengen Visa website](#).



When making travel arrangements, we encourage you to keep informed of the current advice and guidance issued by the UK's [FCDO travel advice website](#) as well as the guidance issued by your home country and the countries you plan to visit. You should also research emergency contact information for your travel destination.

6 End of your placement

6.1 Withdrawal procedure and contract termination

If a Language Assistant is unable to take up the post offered to them or must withdraw from the programme after beginning their post, they should inform their host institution / local authority immediately in writing. The Assistant should also inform the British Council of their withdrawal, as well as the organisation who runs the Language Assistants programme in their home country.

By requesting a Language Assistant, your employer has agreed to [our Terms and Conditions](#) which include the following clauses:

- If a host institution or local authority withdraws after the language assistant has received the Offer Letter, the host institution or local authority will be liable to pay any costs incurred by the language assistant in either changing or cancelling their placement, including but not limited to travel, accommodation and visa costs.
- If the host institution or local authority chooses to terminate the language assistant's contract for any reason other than gross misconduct or breach of contract after the start of the language assistant's placement, they agree to pay any costs which the language assistant has incurred up to the point of termination and will incur to return to their country of origin.



Employers have the same right of dismissal over their Language Assistant as over other members of staff. If a breach of the rules or gross misconduct occurs, it is up to the host institution or local authority to assess the severity of this situation and then deal with it in accordance with their own procedures.

Should any problems arise with the Language Assistant, employers must ensure that the British Council is informed immediately.

6.2 Administrative matters

6.2.1 Remaining salary and tax



Do not close your UK bank account until you have received your final month's pay or any income tax that is due to be returned to you.

- **Income Tax:** If you have paid too much income tax and it has not been returned to you already, then make sure you complete the [HMRC P85 form](#) before you leave.
- **National Insurance/Social Security:** To have National Insurance contributions that you have made in the UK credited to your country's Social Security system, you should complete

the [HMRC CA3916 form](#). Alternatively, when you return home, you will need to contact your Social Security office and tell them that you have made National Insurance contributions in the UK. The Social Security authorities will contact the HMRC on your behalf to request the relevant paperwork.

Staff at the British Council are not trained in tax – you need to contact HMRC or your local tax office for further advice. *See [section 4.7.2](#) for more information and contact details.*

6.2.2 Leaving your accommodation

Please make sure that you leave a good impression with your landlord – one of next year’s assistants may be depending on this!

Ask your landlord:

- How do I terminate my rental agreement?
- What do I need to do for my deposit to be returned?

If you rent your flat through a property agency, it is likely that they will carry out an inspection before returning your deposit; if possible, you should make sure that you are present during the inspection to avoid any potential disagreements later.

You should also leave a forwarding address with your landlord so that they can forward any mail on to you.

6.2.3 Council Tax after your placement finishes

If you are staying on in your current accommodation after your Language Assistant contract ends, you will have to pay Council Tax.

Your student status for the purposes of Council Tax only lasts for the time of your official post as a Language Assistant. You must discuss this with your landlord.

6.3 Visa requirements: Proof of return

As your visa sponsor, the British Council must collect evidence that you have left the Common Travel Area (CTA) on or before your visa expiry date. The Common Travel Area (CTA) is made up of the UK, Ireland and the Crown Dependencies (Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man).

You are required to send the British Council a copy of your boarding pass from your flight home and/or the stamp in your passport that proves you have returned home safely. Even if you are not going directly to your home country after your placement in the UK, you will still need to send us the boarding pass or stamp from your flight out of the CTA to show that you left the CTA within your visa dates.

We will send full instructions about this towards the end of your assistantship.

6.4 Consecutive year as a Language Assistant

Unfortunately, it is not possible for Language Assistants to extend their contracts for a second year. Our programme is only intended as a short-term mobility experience and we can only sponsor your UK visa for one year in total. Additionally, there is a long waiting list of candidates every year wanting to gain experience in the UK, and we must give priority to first-time applicants.

6.5 Training as a teacher or studying in the UK

When you finish your time as a Language Assistant, you may be interested to find out more about training as a teacher in the UK.

For up-to-date information visit the following websites:

- [Find post-graduate teacher training courses](#) (UK wide)
- [Get into Teaching \(England\)](#)
- [Department of Education \(Northern Ireland\)](#)
- [Teach in Scotland \(Scotland\)](#)
- [Discover Teaching \(Wales\)](#)

Alternatively, you may be considering studying in the UK and you can find out more on the British Council's [StudyUK website](#).

Appendix 1: Modern Language Assistants' Code of Conduct

Modern Language Assistants are reminded that the assistantship is a job. Colleagues in the institution(s) in which you are appointed will expect you to behave in a responsible and professional manner. In cases of serious misconduct Assistants can be, and have been, dismissed by their host institution(s).

- You must be present to take your timetabled groups/classes but are not required to remain on your institution's premises at other times.
- You should work under the guidance/direction of the responsible class teacher(s).
- You are obliged to work up to 12 hours per week, excluding preparation time; any hours worked over the 12-hour period are by mutual written agreement and will be paid on a pro-rata basis.
- You must ensure that you are punctual for every lesson and, if possible, arrive before the class is due to begin.
- You shall prepare thoroughly and in advance for lessons, check what is expected of you, and remember that you are an employee of the institution and are being paid as such.
- If you find yourself unsupervised with a student, conduct the class with the door open so that you can be observed at all times.
- Under no circumstances should you ever have physical contact with a child/student, not even in a friendly or encouraging way.
- You should always be aware of your behaviour and relationship with the students and check if these are appropriate in the institution.
- You are encouraged and expected to use the internet for professional purposes, and you can usually do so at your institution. However, you should check with your mentor when you can and cannot use the internet. If you access pornographic and other unsuitable sites (even accidentally) on host institution computers, you could be dismissed from your assistantship.
- You should be very careful about how you use social-networking sites during your assistantship. Keep your profile private so that it can only be viewed by people you intend to view it. You should never swap personal contact details with students or invite them to be 'friends', or accept similar invitations from them, as this is regarded as inappropriate behaviour and could lead to disciplinary action.
- You should seek permission, in writing, from the headteacher for any unscheduled day of leave that is a genuine emergency and abide by the response; it is not acceptable to leave a message with any other member of staff and assume permission is granted.

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- You should speak at the earliest opportunity to your mentor or the head teacher's secretary when incapacitated by illness and unable to take classes. You must be aware of and abide by the host institution's policy on absence in the case of illness. Sick leave of a certain number of days (the number varies among host institutions) must normally be justified by a medical certificate from a doctor.
 - You should offer to make up any and every class missed on account of personal illness or for any other reason, including exam leave.
 - You are expected, while on your institution's premises, to dress and behave in a manner acceptable to the host institution. Clothing that is smart is the norm; however, you should take your lead from what the other teachers are wearing and ask them what is appropriate for that particular institution. As you are in a professional situation, you should dress accordingly and respect the guidelines given.
 - If your accommodation is on your institution's premises, abide by the institution's regulations regarding noise, visitors, etc.
 - If disciplinary rules are broken, you will be required to comply with the institution's grievance and disciplinary policy.
 - Assistants will be given the name and position of the designated member of staff whom they should contact in case of dissatisfaction with any disciplinary decision or grievance.

Appendix 2: Curriculum stages in the UK

Below is a brief comparison of the different stages in use in primary and secondary schools:

	Ages	Description/stages	Education sector
National Curriculum, England and Curriculum for Wales, Wales			
Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	3–5	Preschool and Reception	Preschool/Primary
Key Stage 1 (KS1)	5–7	Years 1 and 2	Primary
Key Stage 2 (KS2)	7–11	Years 3, 4, 5 and 6	Primary
Key Stage 3 (KS3)	11–14	Years 7, 8 and 9	Secondary
Key Stage 4 (KS4)	14–16	Years 10 and 11	Secondary
	16–18	Years 12 and 13	Secondary/ Tertiary
Curriculum for Excellence, Scotland			
Early Level	3/4 - 5/6	Preschool and Primary 1 (P1)	Preschool/Primary
First Level	5/6 – 8/9	Primary 2–4 (P2–P4)	Primary
Second Level	8/9 – 11/12	Primary 5–7 (P5–P7)	Primary
Third and Fourth Level	11/12 – 14/15	Secondary 1–3 (S1– S3)	Secondary
Senior Phase	14/15 – 17/18	Secondary 4–6 /college or other	Secondary/Tertiary
National Curriculum, Northern Ireland			
Foundation Stage	4–6	P1 and P2	Primary
Key Stage 1 (KS1)	6–8	P3 and P4	Primary
Key Stage 2 (KS2)	8–11	P5, P6 and P7	Primary
Key Stage 3 (KS3)	11–14	Years 8, 9 and 10	Secondary
Key Stage 3 (KS3)	14–16	Years 11 and 12	Secondary
Post-16	16–18	Years 13 and 14	Secondary/Tertiary

Appendix 3: Cultural Institutes and Professional Associations in the UK

Cultural institutes promote language learning, but also foster knowledge and understanding about the cultures that speak them across the world. Stay connected with them throughout the year and benefit from their teaching resources and events.

Language	Name of Organisation	Resources
French	<u>Institut Français</u>	<u>Mallette pédagogique</u>
German	<u>Goethe Institute</u>	<u>DEUTSCH UNTERRICHTEN</u>
Italian	<u>Instituto Italiano di Cultura</u>	<u>Settimana Della Lingua Italiana</u>
Spanish	<u>Consejería de Educación</u>	<u>Publicaciones y materiales didácticos</u>
Mandarin	<u>Confucius Institute</u>	<u>Teaching Materials</u>

Professional associations create networks for teachers of languages to share practice, build support for and promote language learning and teaching in the UK. Their opportunities can help you to build your network and awareness of the sector.

UK Nation	Name of Organisation	Resources and Events
England, Wales and Northern Ireland	<u>Association for Language Learning (ALL)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research and Practice</u> • <u>Events</u>
England	<u>National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Resources</u> • <u>Events</u>
Northern Ireland	<u>Northern Ireland Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (NICILT)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Resources</u> • <u>Events</u>
Scotland	<u>Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Teacher support</u>
	<u>Scottish Association for Language Teaching (SALT)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>SALT Conference 2020</u>
	<u>Scotland China Education Network</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Chinese Teaching Club</u>

Appendix 4: Acronyms

		Applicable in
AifL	Assessment is for Learning	Scotland
ALL	The Association for Language Learning	UK
AS	Advanced Subsidiary Level	England, Wales, Northern Ireland
A2	Advanced Level	England, Wales, Northern Ireland
AQA	Assessment awarding authority	England, Wales, Northern Ireland
BRP	Biometric Residence Permit	UK
CT	Chartered Teacher	Scotland
DfE	Department for Education	England, Wales, Northern Ireland
DHT	Deputy Head Teacher	UK
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service	England and Wales
DTA	Double Taxation Agreement	UK
DtS	Determined to Succeed	Scotland
DVLA	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	UK
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions	UK
EEA	European Economic Area	UK
EFL	English as a Foreign Language	UK
EHIC	European Health Insurance Card	UK
EA	Education Authority	Northern Ireland
EU	European Union	UK
EWC	Education Workforce Council	Wales
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education	England, Wales, Northern Ireland
GP	General Practitioner (doctor)	UK
GTC	General Teaching Council (for England and Wales)	England, Wales
GTCS	General Teaching Council for Scotland	Scotland
GTCNI	General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland
HoD	Head of Department	UK

HT	Head teacher	UK
ICT	Information and Communications Technology	UK
ISIC	International Student Identity Card	UK
IT	Information Technology	UK
IWB	Interactive White Board	UK
KS	Key Stage	England, Wales, Northern Ireland
LA	Local authority	UK
LGPS	Local Government Pension Scheme	England, Wales, Northern Ireland
MLA	Modern Language Assistant	UK
ML/MFL	Modern Languages/Modern Foreign Languages	UK
MLPS	Modern Languages in the Primary School	Scotland
NI	National Insurance	UK
NICILT	Northern Ireland Centre for Language Teaching	Northern Ireland
NIRU	National Import Reliefs Unit	England, Wales
NQT	Newly qualified teacher	UK
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education	England, Wales, Northern Ireland
OHT	Overhead transparency	UK
P1–P7	Primary 1 – Primary 7 (pupils aged 5–11)	Scotland
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education	England, Wales, Northern Ireland
PGDE	Professional Graduate Diploma in Education	Scotland
PT	Principal teacher	Scotland
PVG	Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme	Scotland
QTS	Qualified teacher status	England, Wales, Northern Ireland
S1–S6	Secondary 1 – Secondary 6 (pupils aged 12–18)	Scotland
SALT	Scottish Association for Language Teaching	Scotland
SCEN	Scotland–China Education Network	Scotland

SCILT	Scotland's National Centre for Languages	Scotland
SMT/SLT	Senior Management Team/Senior Leadership Team	UK
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority	Scotland
SSP	Statutory Sick Pay	UK
TDA	Training and Development Agency for Schools	England, Wales, Northern Ireland
TPA	Teachers' Pension Scheme	England

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