

Language Assistants in Belgium
2024-25 Programme

ELA in Belgium: The Guide

August 2024

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How to use this guide

[Section 1](#) provides an overview of Belgium and key country information

[Section 2](#) indicates key contacts for your assistantship and their roles

[Section 3](#) provides detail regarding the assistantship role and what this involves

[Section 4](#) and [5](#) helps you to prepare the essentials before you arrive in Belgium

[Section 5](#) to [9](#) covers all core aspects and documents you will need once you arrive in Belgium

[Section 10](#) is for you to consider at the end of your placement.

Each section includes a recap at the end to highlight the key actions. These are not exhaustive but highlight the main takeaways.

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.

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.

Date checked: 21/08/2024

Belgium Overview

1 Spotlight on Belgium

Did you know that the British Council Language Assistants Programme first began back in 1905 with English masters heading over to France?

You are joining the next generation of this legacy strengthening educational and cultural links between the UK and Belgium through the British Council and our partners Wallonie-Bruxelles International.

By this point, you should have fair knowledge about Belgium. Here are our key points to consider.

1.1 Emergency Contacts

1.1.1 Emergency services in Belgium

In any emergency: call **112** Medical assistance & Fire Brigade: call **100**

Police (gendarmerie): call **101**

General enquiries to the British Embassy:

Tel: +32 2 287 62 11

Fax: +32 2 287 62 50

British Consular Emergency Service for any emergency queries at any time of any day. Leave a message and someone will normally get back to you within one hour of your call.

1.1.2 British embassy and consulate

For up-to-date British Embassy and consulate contact details in Belgium please refer to the [GOV.UK website](#). Please take note of the address of the British Embassy in Belgium below in case of emergency or loss of your passport. Assistants who do not hold British citizenship should check with their own Consulates/Embassies in Belgium.

[The British Embassy in Brussels](#)

Avenue d'Auderghem 10

Oudergemlaan, 1040 Brussels

Tel: +32 2 287 62 11

1.2 Life in Belgium

If you're keen to do some more research of Belgium or your region, check out these sites:

General	News
Visit Belgium	Le Soir
Public Holidays Calendar	L'Echo
Rough Guide to Belgium	UK Government site on Belgium
Lonely Planet Belgium	Belgium Government Site
Bruxelles-J	BBC's Belgium Profile

1.2.1 Personal safety and Travel

Your personal safety is of paramount importance while living overseas and we strongly advise that you spend some time looking at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office website and check it regularly as there is a lot of useful and up-to-date information provided.

As mentioned in section 3.1 of this document, ensure you regularly check the [Belgium travel advice page](#) and are aware of these key sections:

- [Safety and Security Page](#)
- [Sexual Assault Support](#)
- [FCDO advice for women travelling abroad](#)
- [Lost Passport recovery](#)

You can find more details on travel in section 4.4

1.2.2 Assistantship

Married students should note that the allowance is intended to provide for one person only. However, if an assistant's spouse remains in the UK and is unemployed, he/she may be barred from income support or be required to refund whatever was received as such since the start of the assistantship. Enquiries should be made well in advance in order to prevent financial difficulties from arising during a married assistant's period of appointment.

1.2.3 Communities

Belgium is divided into three regions: Wallonia, Flanders and Bruxelles Capital region. Both Wallonia and Flanders are further subdivided into provinces.

There are also three communities: the Dutch speaking, French speaking and German speaking. The German-speaking community is mostly concentrated in the east of the Walloon region. The Flemish community is concentrated in the northern Flanders region. French speakers are split between Wallonia and Bruxelles.

The power of the federal government remains, but the communities and regions also have significant power, including establishing and maintaining foreign relations.

1.3 Local laws and customs

As well as the information on the [GOV.UK site for Belgian laws and customs](#), make sure you are aware of the following:

Religious Symbols

Our partners WBI have stated that the wearing of religious symbols is not permitted in all educational establishments across Belgium (which is not in line with UK and British Council policy). Teachers are not allowed to wear religious symbols and/or clothing. Unfortunately, we have no control over this decision, and it is something candidates should be aware of when applying to be a language assistant in Belgium.

Laws

Co-operating partners abroad have requested that the attention of British visitors be drawn to the severe penalties imposed for the following:

- drug offences which may result in heavy fines and prison sentences.
- for taking part in unlawful political demonstrations which may result in heavy fines and prison sentences.

You are therefore strongly advised not to become involved in these activities.

LGBTQ+

[Lonely Planet guide for LGBT travellers](#)

Internet and Phone

- The Country code for Belgium is +32. To phone abroad from Belgium the code is 00 followed by the country code.
- Buy a phonecard as soon as possible on arrival in Belgium: there are very few coin-operated payphones.
- Assistants often recommend getting a pay as you go mobile rather than one on contract
- With regards to service providers, previous assistants have mentioned Mobistar and Proximus.
- Be aware that calls to the UK from a mobile can be expensive. Previous assistants have recommended using Skype, WhatsApp and Facebook messenger as alternatives.

Section 1 Recap

- Read through FCDO Travel Guidance
- Save emergency contacts and information
- Read key information on life in Belgium

Language Assistants Programme Overview

2 Key Contacts

2.1 UK British Council Language Assistants team

The Language Assistants programme has a dedicated team to provide support during the application and pre-departure process for each destination. Please note the British Council is not the employer of participants of the Language Assistants programme while abroad.

2.2 Partner Organisation: Wallonie-Bruxelles International

Wallonie-Bruxelles International (WBI) administers the Language Assistants Programme in Belgium. They liaise with the schools in Belgium and allocate assistants to specific schools. They will contact you throughout the year regarding your placement and other opportunities.

2.3 School

The school you are allocated to is your employer and any changes to your contract should be liaised with them.

2.4 Mentor Teacher

Your host school should identify a mentor teacher for you, usually in the English department. This mentor should provide pastoral care and support during your time in Belgium. Your mentor teacher can become an integral part of your support network in Belgium, and you should invest time in building this relationship.

If a mentor teacher is not identified at the start of your placement, you should try asking for one and then contact the Wallonie-Bruxelles International for support as soon as you can.

Application, Allocation and Pre-Departure	Sending Organisation: British Council Esther McKnight , Consultant Rand Abdoun-Machaal , Assistant Consultant languageassistants.uk@britishcouncil.org Responsible for: application and pre-departure processes
Arrival and Assistentship	Partner Organisation: Wallonie-Bruxelles International (WBI) Bernadette Schreuer , Chargée de Mission - bernadette.schreuer@cfwb.be Mathilde Romain , Responsable du programme des auxiliaires de conversation - m.romain@wbi.be Responsible for: Programme in Belgium and liaising with educational authorities and schools.
Assistentship in school	Employer: School Responsible for: Salary and HR Support: Mentor Teacher Responsible for: In-school support and first contact

Section 2 Recap



Understand role of the British Council, WBI and the School

Establish and connect with your mentor teacher

3 The English Language Assistant role

The role of a language assistant is a very important one and one that we hope you will enjoy. Please remember that you are a paid member of staff with the responsibilities and required professionalism that this entails. Please refer to [our website](#) for more information on your role as an English Language Assistant.

As a language assistant you are also an ambassador for the UK and its culture, influencing how those around you view the UK. You should endeavour to set a positive example and avoid any potential damage to the reputation of the programme and adversely affect the experience of future assistants.

Your first-hand experience of life in the UK is a key part of the cultural exchange and an excellent resource you should draw upon during your lessons.

3.1 Posting information

Each school differs as to when they send out information. The British Council is involved in passing on your application to our partner organisation in Belgium but has no control over choice of town, size of town, school environment or when information is sent out.

Once you receive this information, you should write immediately to your school(s) confirming acceptance of the post. If you do not receive a reply by mid-September, it is a good idea to ring the school(s) to ask about accommodation and give them an idea of your anticipated arrival date. You should also ask them for some information about the school(s) that you will be working in. For example, it may be useful to know the age range of pupils, the average class size, the general level of ability, the social background of pupils, the facilities available and if you should bring any specific materials from home. It is also important to enquire about the dress code for teachers and any other general school information.

3.2 Period of Appointment

The period of appointment for UK assistants in Belgium will be 1st October 2024 – 31 May 2025. Assistants are expected to work 12 hours a week. Those who have been appointed to more than one school will be asked to divide their time between the schools concerned. You can request information regarding how your timetable will be arranged from the head of the host school, which is usually the first one mentioned when you are sent details of your posting however this information will most likely not be available until you arrive in Belgium.

3.3 Holidays and Sick Leave

Assistants are entitled to the usual school holidays. You should be able to obtain the dates from your school's secretary. You should not be absent on other occasions without prior permission. Attending the induction course does not give assistants the right to take leave at a later date.

Find out from your school the procedure you must follow if you are sick. You will most likely have to inform your mentor teacher and/or school as soon as possible on your first day of absence. Depending on the school's policy you may need to provide a sick note after a certain number of days' absence.

3.4 School allocation

The maximum number of schools to which you can be appointed is three. Please contact us if you have been appointed to more than three schools. If the different schools are several miles apart and you have to travel between two on the same day, you are entitled to ask for help towards travel expenses. Under no circumstances should an assistant be required to buy a car just to get to their schools. After contacting your school, if you establish that there is no regular public transport which serves your school(s), and there are no lifts available to your school(s) please inform us of the situation. Please do not contact us without contacting your school first.

Section 3 Recap



Receive allocation and school details



Accept post offer from school and ask for more details



Save key contact information

Preparation before you go

4 Read before you go

4.1 Costs to prepare

You should prepare for the following costs:

- £90 ICPC
- Administrative costs: visa (if applicable).
- Travel costs
- Accommodation costs
- Insurance costs
 - Approximately €1000 - €2000 available for initial costs and to cover your first month's expenses. This amount may differ depending on your location and how much rent you are required to pay in advance.
 - Take €200 - €350 of this in ready cash.

4.2 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) advice

During a crisis, official advice for British nationals will be published on the [travel advice website](#) and regularly updated. For your safety and to stay well-informed, we **strongly recommend** you [subscribe to receive FCDO email updates](#) for Belgium so that you are immediately notified of any important changes to the FCDO's advice.

As international issues and subsequent advice can change often and rapidly, you must take responsibility for your own health and safety by staying informed of any changes to such

advice. When responding to an immediate in-country danger or threat to your health and safety, you should always prioritise your own health and safety and make decisions in the best interest for your personal circumstances – do not wait for advice from the British Council.

The FCDO have published a comprehensive guide for [Living in Belgium](#). The guide sets out essential information for British nationals residing in Belgium, including advice on health, education, residence requirements and more. We recommend you read this guide thoroughly.

You can also contact the British embassy for advice in the event of an emergency.

4.3 Passports and visas

Those who are not in possession of a passport, or need a new one, should complete the application procedure as soon as possible either through a regional Passport Office or [online](#). You should [check your passport eligibility for Europe](#).

If you have a non-EU passport, you will be applying for a Visa D (B34 Permis Unique). The British Council UK team will work with our partners at WBI and yourselves to provide them with the documentation required to assemble your dossier. In order to apply for the visa, you must have the following documents:

- Annexe 46
- Passport
- Fee Exemption form (if applicable)

Assistants are expected to cover the costs of this, which can include sourcing documentation and attending visa appointments.

4.4 Travel to and around Belgium

You are responsible for the upfront cost of your own travel and any travel to and from your place of appointment during the year.

The British Council strongly advises against booking your travel until you have received your visa and are certain that you will be able to travel on your chosen date. In some instances, you may be able to pay the airline a small fee for flexible dates if you wish to book further in advance. The British Council is not responsible for arranging your travel.

Past assistants have advised that you check the baggage allowance for both outbound and return journeys when travelling by plane.

The most widely used travel sites in Belgium are:

Flights	Train and Ferry	In Belgium
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Skyscanner	Eurostar	Belgian Public Transport
British Airways	Rail Europe	SNCB (Belgium Rail)
easyJet	Eurolines	
TUI	Interrail	
Opodo	Direct Ferries	
Expedia		
Ryanair		

Other Travel Pointers:

- [Bla Bla Car](#): Car-share - website for sharing arrangements.
- Alcohol limits: the alcohol limit in Belgium is 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood. Do not drink and drive. Advice on driving and the law can be found [here](#).

Former Assistant recommendations:

- You can become a member of [Blue-Bike](#) for 12€ annually which allows you to rent a bike from train stations in more than 90 locations.
- You will find it cheaper for local travel to buy a carnet of 10 tickets or a *carte urbaine* than to buy one ticket at a time.
- The TEC in Wallonia have a subscription pass for passengers aged 18-24 that costs €12 (plus €5 for the card) for a whole year and allows you to travel through multiple regions. For this, you need to go to the local TEC ESPACE with proof of identity (e.g. passport or identity card), proof of address, and a passport-style photo. This pass allows you to travel in any TEC bus in Wallonia and through multiple zones.
- [International Student Identity Cards](#) or for non-students [International Youth Travel Card](#) can be used to obtain cheap entry into certain museums, theatres, cinemas and art galleries throughout Europe. Holders of an ISIC card will in general be eligible to apply for an *abonnement scolaire* (the school secretary should have details).

4.4.1 Taking a car abroad

You will need to research the laws on driving in Belgium, including adapting your head lights for driving on the right and driving licenses. The [GOV.UK](#) website provides useful information on motoring abroad. It is also worth considering insurance and additional documentation you may require.

4.4.2 Taking pets abroad

You need to consider insurance, pet passports and health certificates. The [government advice page on taking your pet to an EU country](#) details more.

4.5 Insurance

Health Insurance

If you only have a British passport then you will be provided with health insurance by the company ETHIAS through WBI for the duration of your assistantship. This is because they are obliged to provide this as part of applying for your Permis Unique.

You are still advised to apply for the GHIC (Global Health Insurance Card).

If you pay for any health care fees during your stay, please consult WBI's 'Guide du boursier' for more information on how to get fees reimbursed by ETHIAS and for the policy number.

If you have EU citizenship, you will **not** be registered for health insurance through ETHIAS by WBI. Instead, you should apply for your GHIC and make sure you have it with you when you arrive in Belgium. The duration of validity can vary so please check that your GHIC will cover you for your whole stay and if not, you are advised to take out additional cover. You should be covered for the entire duration of your stay. Make sure you are aware of the type of care and treatments that are covered by the GHIC.

For all assistants: if you have private health insurance in the UK, make sure to inform your provider that you will be travelling abroad and check what cover is provided in Belgium, if any at all. If necessary, take out additional cover.

You can register with a Belgian insurance provider during your stay so that if you do use your GHIC, you can be reimbursed by the Belgian provider. This is not mandatory as you can ask to be reimbursed by the NHS once you have returned to the UK. The advantage of registering with a Belgian insurance provider means that you can get reimbursed quicker. You can also get reimbursed in case you become incapable of working.

You can register with a Belgian insurance provider in person or online. Please consult WBI's 'Guide du boursier' page 19 for a list of recommended Belgian health insurance providers.

Personal Accident & Civil Liability Insurance

All assistants benefit from personal accident and civil liability insurance provided by ETHIAS through WBI called 'assurance responsabilité civile – vie privée'. If you are subject to any incidents, you must inform WBI and follow the instructions in the 'Guide du boursier' page 20. You can also find the policy number in the guide.

To benefit from personal liability insurance called 'assurance responsabilité civile – vie scolaire/professionnelle' for incidents that take place at your school/during your teaching hours, inform your school and ask them to follow the instructions in the 'Guide du boursier' page 20 with their unique policy number.

Repatriation

All assistants benefit from repatriation insurance: 'assurance rapatriement'. This is also provided by ETHIAS through WBI. More information can be found in the 'Guide du boursier' as well as the policy number.

Remember that normally your health insurance only covers you within your host country during your allocated time there, therefore if you travel outside the country during or after that period, you may need additional insurance. If you do leave Belgium at any point, it is highly advised to take out insurance for the country / countries that you visit.

4.6 Graduates with student loans

If you have a student loan, you will need to let student finance know that you are going to Belgium. Complete an Overseas Income Assessment Form to enable the Student Loans Company to calculate how much you need to repay.

You will be required to provide evidence of income or means of support. They will then send you a repayment schedule showing how much you need to pay each month. Your monthly payments will be based upon the earnings threshold for your destination. The British Council UK team are not able to advise on student loan matters. For all questions relating to student loans, please contact Student Finance directly.

4.7 Benefits and Universal Credit

If you are in receipt of government support in the UK, you must inform the authorities that you are moving to work abroad. Tell your local Jobcentre Plus or the office that pays your benefit if you are going abroad. If it is a temporary move, tell them when you are coming back. You must also tell HMRC if you are leaving the UK.

Section 4 Recap

- Sign up for FCDO email alerts
- Ensure you have a valid passport
- Obtain a visa if required
- Book travel to Belgium once you have the Visa and ICPC
- Get Comprehensive Insurance where necessary
- Inform UK authorities you are leaving (loans, benefits etc.)

5 Health and wellbeing

Before you go

Planning

At least 8 weeks before your trip, check the latest country-specific health advice from the [National Travel Health Network and Centre \(NaTHNaC\)](#) on the TravelHealthPro website. Each Belgium-specific page has information on vaccine recommendations, any current health risks or outbreaks, and factsheets with information on staying healthy abroad. Guidance is also available from NHS (Scotland) on the [FitForTravel](#) website.

General information on travel vaccinations and a travel health checklist is available on the NHS website. You may then wish to contact your health adviser or pharmacy for advice on other preventive measures and managing any pre-existing medical conditions while you're abroad.

Make sure you have comprehensive travel and medical insurance covering healthcare and medical evacuation and repatriation for the duration of your stay.

Medication

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in the UK can be different in Belgium. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of Belgium or territory you're travelling to.

If you are on prescription medication, make sure you either bring enough with you or have access to a supply once in Belgium. Certain medicines may not be available in Belgium (including major brands readily available in the UK), and you may be prohibited from bringing some medicines into Belgium. For more information and advice, check with your GP and the Embassy of Belgium before travelling.

5.1 EHIC/GHIC

UK-issued European Health Insurance Cards (EHICs) are still valid and offer the same cover as GHICs in the EU. Once your EHIC has expired, you'll be able to replace it with a GHIC.

The Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) gives you the right to access state-provided healthcare during a temporary stay in the European Union (EU). The GHIC is not an alternative to travel insurance but gives you access to healthcare which becomes medically necessary during your stay, and you cannot reasonably wait until you're back in the UK to get it.

You can find out more online about the free [UK Global Health Insurance Card from the NHS](#).

5.2 Belgium Healthcare

These sites provide more information on Belgium healthcare:

- [Choosing a Doctor](#)
- [Belgium Healthcare costs](#)

Please see the [Foreign Commonwealth Office website](#) for more information regarding healthcare in Belgium.

If you require urgent medical attention in Belgium dial **120**.

If your medicine is available from suppliers in Belgium, doctors may first want to conduct their own diagnosis before repeating a prescription issued elsewhere. It is also important to find out where your nearest doctor, dentist and hospital are as soon as you arrive. You should ask your school for information about the facilities in your area and advise staff and your landlord of any medical conditions.

5.3 Mental health

Although working abroad can be enjoyable, it can also be challenging. Lack of familiar support systems, disrupted daily routines, language barriers, culture shock and unexpected situations can intensify stress levels rather than alleviate them.

It is important to remember that culture shock affects everyone. There is no shame in admitting that you are having a difficult time. Belgium is a very culturally distinct place. If you do feel homesick or frustrated, please talk to your fellow teachers on the programme as they will understand how you are feeling better than anyone else. Also, be sure to keep up to date with your family and friends back home.

Your mental health is just as important as your physical health. It is advised to read this information even if you are not currently suffering from mental health problems.

The Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office provides information about mental health and travel via the following links:

- [Mental Health and Wellbeing Abroad](#)
- [Mental Health Travelling Abroad Checklist](#)

[The NHS Website](#) lists a couple of helplines that can offer expert advice to people with different mental health needs.

Another useful resource is [Better Help](#), but be aware that they charge \$35 / week for their services, with a possibility to apply for financial aid.

Section 5 Recap

Ensure you have medication you need/can access from Belgium

Sort your EHIC/GHIC prior to leaving

Read about Mental Health support available

6 Outside of school: Arrival and settling in

6.1 Residence permit

All assistants must apply for a residence permit within 8 days of arriving in Belgium (carte d'immatriculation) at the Bureau des Étrangers in the town hall (maison communale).

You will get through this procedure much more quickly if you go to the town hall in your local area rather than to the one in your nearest big city.

When submitting your application, you will need to present all or most of the following items:

- 4 passport-sized photos
- ID card/passport (originals and copies)
- attestation from the WBI
- contrat de bail or attestation (si chez l'habitant), obtainable from school or landlord as appropriate (this is also necessary to open a bank account)
- fee (price varies for each commune)
- European/Global Health Insurance Card (EHIC/GHIC)
- Permis unique documentation if a Visa Holder
- If you have a visa, please check with our partners and your mentor teacher regarding any administrative steps you may need to take in country.

6.2 Accommodation

6.2.1 General Advice

Some websites you may find useful are:

Accommodation Type	Useful Links
Temporary accommodation:	Hostelling International Hostel World Airbnb

Permanent accommodation	Immoweb Immovlan	Zimmo Appartager
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A formal contract to rent an apartment sometimes requires the signature of a garant (guarantor). If you do not know anyone resident in Belgium who is prepared to act as your guarantor (i.e. undertake to pay your rent/debts should you default), it may help if you have a formal letter from your parents, written in French, stating their financial guarantee: see suggested format enclosed in your summer pack (Lettre de Garantie). Alternatively, your mentor teacher or a friendly teacher at school might be prepared to 'take the risk'.

Who to contact?
family/friends
locals
student/youth/religious organisations
twinned hometowns

Where to look?
Ring local halls of residence
Newspapers (early morning!)
Noticeboards
staffboards, mairie, citizens advice, tourist office,
Online

What to bring?
Residency Documents
Identity document
Bank statement
Lettre de Garantie

Watch out for!
Needing a Guarantor
Agency Fees
Notice period

1. Do not advertise in local papers/public places
2. Take a dossier of key papers with you
3. Only sign if you are happy with the agreement
4. Take photos when you move in

6.2.2 Before Signing an Agreement

- Always ask about additional fees such as agency charges
- Landlords may ask for 1 month's rent as a deposit (une caution)
- Get any agreements in writing, and obtain receipts for any transaction, keeping them secure.
- Confirm your period of notice you must give to move out – in Belgium a minimum of three months' notice is usually the legal requirement. You may also have to give this notice in writing by registered mail.
- Enquire about the possibility of including a 'diplomatic clause' in the rental agreement to allow for a shorter notice period in case of early termination of your placement.
- Take any photos capturing the condition of your room and the flat before moving in to prevent unfairly losing any of your security deposit.
- Check health and safety issues (temporary and long term) such as fire alarms and exits, gas leaks, electrics, water etc.

When you have found somewhere to live, even if it has been arranged for you, do not sign any agreement you are not comfortable with and make sure that there is a period of notice written in the contract to avoid problems, should you decide to change your accommodation during the year.

Section 6 Recap



7 In school: arrival, settling in and support

7.1 Induction

Wallonie-Bruxelles International (WBI) will likely organise a welcome day for all foreign language assistants. Please note, the British Council has no involvement whatsoever in the organisation of these meetings. If this takes place, you will receive details about this induction from WBI so this is just for your information. The format of the induction varies but it provides you with useful information about your placement directly from the local education authorities and is a great chance for you to meet other assistants in your region. **Attendance is expected.**

7.2 Observation Period

When you first arrive at your school(s) you should ask for a period of observation of 1-2 weeks. It may not be offered to you automatically. Observation will allow you to familiarise yourself with the school environment, to experience classroom management techniques as well as to get to know the names, faces and personalities of your pupils and gauge their level of English. Try to note the following:

- How the teacher starts and ends the lesson;
- How the teacher speaks to pupils;
- How the teacher involves all pupils, including shy ones, in the class activity;
- What the teacher's attitude is to pupil errors and error correction; and
- How the teacher controls disruptive behaviour, lateness and lack of effort

This can also be a valuable opportunity to discuss with your mentor teacher about the following:

- How you are finding your experience and settling in

- If you have any additional requirements which may facilitate your placement.

7.2.1 Settling into school life

You can hear tips from former assistants in our [settling in podcast](#).

Starting any new job can be a daunting experience, no matter how confident a person you are. It's completely normal to be unsure of where to go, what to do or who to talk to at the beginning.

Apart from your work in the classroom you may be able to attend other classes in subjects which interest you. You will find that you become much more integrated into school life and gain considerably more from your stay if you become involved in activities organised by the school, such as sports days, theatre or music productions or modern language societies. Go to school 'open days' or parent evenings as these are also a good way of meeting people.

Teachers who are proactive and take the initiative often settle into school life much faster. Being a self-starter is a great way to make a strong first impression. Teachers are often very busy and will certainly appreciate your efforts to help and try to make an impact.

7.3 Absence from school

Please remember that you are a member of staff and must therefore adhere to the holiday dates set by the school. If you cannot work because of illness you should inform your school(s) immediately by telephone. Please also inform WBI directly if you have to be absent from school.

You may be asked to provide a medical certificate from a doctor. It should contain exact dates and cover the entire duration of the absence. This must be sent to the school as soon as it is issued. Any prolonged absence on account of illness should be reported as soon as possible to WBI and to the British Council.

Requests for leave of absence for any other reason should be made in advance to the head of the school(s) who is within his/her right to refuse it. You are reminded that if you are absent from school without prior authorisation, your allowance will be discontinued from the first day of your absence.

If it becomes necessary to resign from your post, you must give sufficient prior notice in writing of your intended departure to the school, Wallonie-Bruxelles International and the British Council, setting out your reasons in full. If you are an undergraduate, you must also inform your university/college in the UK.

7.4 Social media

You should be very careful about how you use social networking sites while you are an assistant in Belgium. Keep your profile private so that it can only be seen by people you intend to see it. If you invite other teachers to be 'friends', remember to remain professional in what you post and be careful what you say about your employer.

You should not exchange personal contact details with students, invite them to be ‘friends’ or accept similar invitations from them. Check with teachers about the school’s internet policy, particularly regarding any online communication involving students either in or outside school. It is exceptionally important that you understand issues around child protection, both to protect the students and to protect you from any damaging and potentially serious accusations.

7.5 Support networks

Give yourself some time to adjust –in the beginning, you will have a lot of administrative matters to deal with. Former assistants have recommended that you don’t spend all your free time with other programme participants, as you will not be able to integrate into your community and life in Belgium. On the other hand, don’t feel that you must cut yourself off from them – your programme peers can provide a very good support network for each other, as you understand each other’s experiences.

Start at school

- Showing that you are enthusiastic and keen to get to know staff will go a long way. Start with a simple hello or ask how their weekend went. Remember, though, that you will be working in a school environment therefore staff may not have a lot of free time.
- Try introducing yourself to staff you may not directly work with, for example teachers in other departments, lunch time staff, receptionists, caretakers etc. If there are social occasions or team meetings try to make an effort to attend.
- If you hear about something happening which interests you, ask if you can become involved. Don’t wait to be invited as people may assume that you’re not interested.

Here are some other ways to meet people in the area:

- Enrol for an evening class, join a sports club, music group, choir
- Join or set up a language exchange
- Enquire about joining the local university and attending lectures
- Get involved in the local culture and join clubs that you couldn’t join in the UK
- Volunteer for a charity, society, festival, etc.

7.6 Concerns and Queries: Who to contact?

Conditions in schools in Belgium differ from those in the UK. We have come up with a ‘Who to contact’ guide to assist you with who to ask if you have a query or concern regarding your placement. Please consult this guide for help on who to contact if you have a query or an issue. The British Council has a zero-tolerance policy approach to discrimination of any kind. If a serious incident occurs and the who to contact sheet is not appropriate, please contact us.

A lot of past assistants may tell you that their assistantship in Belgium was the best year of their life. This can raise expectations and often leads to people feeling low, especially during the first few weeks until they settle in.

The assistantship year is a wonderful opportunity to absorb French language and Belgian culture and gain much in life experience and transferable skills. However, it is perfectly understandable that when abroad in a completely different environment there may be times when you feel homesick, have trouble with pupils or colleagues, or with your living situation or so on.

Meeting regularly with your mentor gives the opportunity for them to feedback about your performance and for you to raise any concerns or issues. Do tell people if you have problems or if you need information as otherwise, they may assume everything is fine.

Section 7 Recap

- Attend Induction
- Carry out an observation period
- Make social media accounts private
- Join in: staff room, societies, clubs
- Follow the 'Who to Contact' guidance sheet
- Reach out if you need support

8 Money Matters

8.1 Bank Account

In order to receive your monthly grant payment, you must open a Belgian or online bank account and send proof of this to WBI by **1 September 2024**.

You will receive your first payment of your grant at the end of November – this will cover your first two months of your assistantship in Belgium.

We advise referring to the *Guide du Boursier* sent by WBI for more information. They have suggested some banks that you may use and they have provided information on how to send the proof of opening an account to WBI.

8.2 Tax

You will have to declare your taxes in Belgium by filling out a form even though you are likely to be exempt from paying any tax. If you have not received this form automatically by mid-September/early October of **the year following** your assistantship, you must declare your

taxes online (Tax-On-Web) via [this link](#). Once you have completed the form, you will be told whether you need to pay any tax or not. This will depend on your individual circumstances such as if you have worked alongside your assistantship or if your only income has been the assistant grant.

Our team cannot assist you in this area because we are not trained in tax, cannot give advice on how your personal circumstances will affect your tax, and for data protection reasons.

We recommend looking into the Double Taxation Agreement between the UK and Belgium, which normally exempts an ELA from Belgian income tax for a period of up to 2 years.

It is important to note that the agreement only covers teaching jobs.

Enquiries regarding UK income tax should be addressed to a local Inspector of Taxes, Please check the [HM Revenue & Customs website](#) for information about who to contact.

8.3 Monthly Grant

The language assistant allowance is usually updated every year in September so the following key info is liable to change.

The allowance is currently €1593.46 per month.

If you are allocated to two schools in two different provinces, you can expect to receive an additional €300.

Consider taking a Credit Card to cover initial costs and be aware that you are often charged for using your British debit card to withdraw money abroad.

8.4 Additional Income

You may be able to take on additional work during your assistantship however please pay attention to the following rules:

If you are a European national or have dual nationality (one nationality being European) and have entered Belgium using your European passport/identity card, you may take on additional work alongside your assistantship. However, this must firstly be under a contract of employment, and you must have received your 'carte de séjour' after registering with the commune (the temporary 'attestation' is not accepted). You will have to sign a written contract with your employer and meet their obligations. Please be aware that you will be taxed on the income that you receive through this paid work but will not be taxed on your assistantship grant however, you must include all forms of income on your tax declaration form.

If you are a British national and do not have any other European nationality, you are not usually permitted to work alongside your assistantship. This is because your work permit only gives you permission to carry out the work stated on the permit and only for the employer stated (Auxiliaire de conversation dans l'établissement de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles).

You may ask another employer to issue you with an additional work permit if you find an employer that is willing to employ you. Please bear in mind that you are required to work 12 – 16 hours per week as a language assistant not including the preparation time needed to plan

lessons. If you do find work with a reasonable number of hours per work as well as an employer that is willing to do all of the paperwork necessary for an additional work permit, this second permit must first be accepted by the authorities, and you must have received your 'carte de séjour' before you are allowed to take on the additional work. It is not common for the authorities in Belgium to accept two work permits at the same time.

You may have heard about student jobs and wondered if you are eligible to apply if you are a student in the UK. Unfortunately, you can only be eligible to apply for a student job in Belgium if you are a full-time student in Belgium. As an English Language Assistant in Belgium, you will not have student status therefore unfortunately, you will not be eligible to apply for student jobs.

Section 8 Recap

- Open a bank account and send the proof to WBI by 1 Sep 2024
- Budget for your salary
- Check your income tax situation

9 Language learning and studies

9.1 For Language Learning

- [BBC- Learn French](#): Offers a wealth of resources for learning French, including short guides and videos.
- [Memrise](#): A sophisticated platform for language learning, with a large online community. App also available.
- [Duolingo](#): A simplistic platform for language learning which is very easy to access. Bite-size lessons allow the user to practice for anywhere from 5 minutes a day. App also available.
- [Anki](#): An online platform for learning, focusing on memory-recall. Packs for specific levels of French available.
- [iLanguages](#): If you wish to learn Flemish.

10 End of your placement

10.1 Administrative matters

Bank: Make sure you do not close your Belgium bank account until you have received any final payments you are due. You are advised to keep your account open for a month or so after the contract with your school has ended to ensure that all outstanding payments have

been received. Please do check on the conditions for transactions relating to your account. For example, it might be that you can only close your account in the same branch in which you opened it.

Accommodation: Please make sure that you leave a good impression with your landlord – a future assistant may be depending on this:

- Leave a forwarding address with your landlord so that they can forward any mail on to you.
- When you leave your accommodation, remember to cancel any personal contracts, e.g. internet or utilities.
- Discuss with your landlord what you need to do for them to return your deposit and terminate your rental agreement, as well as arranging the return of your belongings if you have already left.
- If you rent your flat through a property agency, they may want to 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 at a later date. Alternatively, you may wish to take photos of your accommodation before leaving to document how it was left.

Reference: If you haven't already done so, please liaise with your host school for a reference.

This will be invaluable when it comes to an official record of your assistantship and for any future applications to be an ELA. This should ideally be on headed paper, stamped and comment on your performance as an assistant.

Please note that as the British Council is not the employer, we are unable to provide references for language assistants, only a certificate certifying participation upon request.

10.2 Consecutive year as an ELA

It is possible to stay for a consecutive year as a British Council language assistant in Belgium. You will have to apply through the British Council but also inform WBI of your decision, including whether you would like to stay in the same host school. Applications will open in the Autumn time and close in early February. Please apply through [this page on our website](#). Priority will be given to first-time applicants.

10.3 Ambassador

Ambassadors play an essential active part in promoting this opportunity. By representing a British Council programme, former assistants will be able to develop their creative, organisational and professional skills and network with the future generation of assistants. To have an opportunity to be involved with this, you must have filled out our end of year survey.

10.4 Getting into Teaching

If you want to take your assistantship to the next level, find out more from the links below of

how to get into teaching and inspire future linguists:

- England: [Get into Teaching](#)
- Wales: [Educators Wales](#)
- Scotland: [Teach In Scotland](#)
- Northern Ireland: [Getting into Teaching](#)