

in an English-speaking country. For example, we can describe immigrants and refugees in the UK as 'ESOL learners'. EFL learners are often defined as students of English who do not live permanently in an English-speaking country and are studying English either in their home country or visiting an English-speaking country. Thus, Japanese learners in a Japanese English class in Japan or Spanish teenagers in a summer school in the UK can all be referred to as EFL learners and their teachers as TEFL teachers. Courses of lessons that take place in private language schools are generally referred to as EFL courses, while classes in community colleges that are often part or fully government funded are normally referred to as ESOL courses. The terms TESL and ESL evolved in the USA and Canada to refer to language teaching in general, but are sometimes also used to contrast with EFL in the same way. ELT is used in the UK. ELT is a more general term used to refer to the industry of teaching practices in general, covering all the above contexts.

A day in the life of an English language teacher

Graduates of the Trinity CertTESOL find themselves working in a variety of teaching contexts around the world, teaching adults, teenagers or children. Here is a fairly typical lifestyle snapshot provided by a recent graduate of the Trinity CertTESOL working in Italy:

My name is Susie Bradshaw. I live in Sicily where I've been for the last nine months after completing my CertTESOL in London. I am an English teacher to both adults and younger learners in private language schools. I do live and a half hours of teaching a day, from Monday to Friday, and occasionally extra lessons (usually one-to-one) on Saturdays. My working day starts at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, which is really handy because I'm not a morning person! I usually get to work for about 12 o'clock to prepare my lessons. My first class is an entire group of Italian primary school teachers. We have a lot of fun together, but they are actually on a serious government funded course to improve their English. After a short break, at about 4.30, we have our younger learner classes. I have a maximum of 7 to 10-year-olds that can be quite demanding, but as my communication skills improve, it's getting gradually easier. If you had told me before my CertTESOL that I'd be teaching kids in a year's time, I'd never have believed you! It's definitely more work than teaching adults, but it can also be rewarding when the kids bring pictures they've drawn at school or spontaneously start singing songs I've taught them. There is a longer break and a bite to eat before my final class. From 7 until 9 I teach a group of adult intermediate learners – my favourite group. They are on a general English course, but many of them also want a little bit of business English, making for an interesting mix. Some of them can be a little tired after a full day's work, so we have to do a lot of study with communicative activities to make sure that they all remain involved and engaged in the lessons. I finish at 9 o'clock and sometimes go for a drink or a meal with either my colleagues or my students, some of whom have become good friends and helped me to settle into my new home. In my free time I'm learning Italian and authentic Italian cooking. I'm also taking an online course on teaching younger learners, which is really useful, and part funded by my employer. In terms of salary I'd say I'm comfortable, but I don't seem to be saving anything! Although I don't have much free time and I'm pretty tired by the end of the day, it's really cool to live in such an interesting city and I'm surprised how much I'm enjoying the job.

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Pause for thought

Take a moment to imagine your own future career path:

- Where do you see yourself in a year's time?
- Who will your students be?
- How will your life be different?

You may already have a good idea of your future plans, or even have a job lined up for you when you have completed your initial training. Alternatively, you may be looking to visit and see what comes along. However, it stands to reason that the more carefully you consider your potential goal at this stage and begin your research, the better your preparation is likely to be. You can start learning a language, find out more about a specific profession or specialisation within English language teaching. Bear in mind that, unlike many other careers, becoming an English language teacher is likely to change your whole life, so it pays to prepare carefully.

B.1 Choosing your CertTESOL course

“Spend some time thinking about the teachers who made an impact on you and make some notes about the behaviours, skills and characteristics that were important for you as a student. This can help you discover the kind of teacher you want to be.”

Sinead, CertTESOL trainer

Whether you are planning a long-term career in TEFL, looking for an opportunity to travel and work at the same time, or simply want to gain a useful qualification, it is important to choose your course carefully. Bear in mind that you may be heading overseas to a different country, where you will be doing a new job with new colleagues for a new employer, so your qualification needs to prepare you for this. While many employers in the industry are reputable, and require standard qualifications such as the CertTESOL from all applicants, there are others who offer the promise of a job either without prior qualification or with only a university degree and no specialist training. Beware especially of adverts that prioritise native speaker status over teaching qualifications.

Those who choose to go teaching without qualifications often find themselves working long hours for unscrupulous employers in schools where working conditions are poor, wages are low and learning is neglected. Stories of exploitation, fraud and even passport confiscation are not uncommon in such circumstances. Given the comparatively short length of initial training for the Trinity CertTESOL, it makes a lot of sense to train for the job properly. This will open up a much wider choice of responsible employers around the world and increase your chances of enjoying the job, simply because you will know more about what you are doing and how to do it.

‘Check out the TEFL courses’ online will return a wide variety of course providers offering accreditation for a modest fee, a few hours of online study and no classroom teaching practice. But beware; any course that does not provide classroom experience can hardly prepare you well for teaching in a classroom and the resulting certificate is likely to be worth no more than the paper it is printed on. The Trinity CertTESOL is one of only two initial ELT qualifications (the other is the Cambridge CELTA) that are internationally recognised by all reputable employers and accredited by OFQUAL (Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) at level 5 on the UK Regulated Qualifications framework (RQF). Whichever course you choose, make sure that it is OFQUAL accredited and currently validated by the relevant organisation. The best way to check this for a CertTESOL course is to visit the Trinity College London website (<http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk>) where you'll find a list of validated course providers and advice on how to choose the best one for your needs. Before you do, let's look at some of the most important choices you will need to make.

Different study options

CertTESOL courses can be taken on a part-time or full-time basis, or integrated into a degree at some universities. Part-time courses tend to require attendance two or three evenings a week and sometimes Saturdays. They run for anything from twelve weeks to a year. Full-time courses usually require eight hours of attendance per day, five days a week, over a period of four or five (occasionally six) weeks. The obvious advantage to part-time courses is that, if you are working or in full-time education, you can study in your 'free' time. Other advantages are that they are less intensive, usually less stressful and allow more time for experimentation and learning to sink in. Unfortunately, such courses are only convenient if there is one nearby and if you're not in a rush to get qualified. Courses integrated into degrees are likely to be less intensive and to offer useful linkage to other aspects of the degree qualification itself.

Many people opt for the full-time CertTESOL, which is often called the 'intensive' CertTESOL for good reason. Especially if the course you choose is ten weeks long, you will have little, if any, free time, even in the evenings or at weekends. The location of the course. So, if you have a choice, think carefully before taking the decision to do an intensive course, and if you don't have a choice, make sure you are well prepared for the workload (see *Preparing for the Workload* below).

There is an important difference between CertTESOL courses run in the UK or other countries where English is spoken as a native language, and courses run 'overseas', where English is not spoken as a native language. In the former context, classes of learners will usually be **multilingual** (i.e. a range of different languages), whereas in the latter context, classes will usually be **monolingual** (i.e. sharing a 'mother tongue' or first language (L1) while also learning English). These two contexts provide different advantages and challenges for the teacher. For example, leading monolingual classes can share translations of vocabulary or concepts. They can also write in their shared language whenever they have difficulty using English. Multilingual classes, on the other hand, provide opportunities for interesting discussions about cultural and linguistic differences and students are obliged to communicate in English. Despite these differences, the same basic methodology tends to be taught in both contexts. If you have a good idea of where you would like to work after your course, check to see if there are any course providers located in that country, as there are a number of potential advantages to training to teach with learners who have the same language and cultural background as your future learners. It also provides you with an opportunity to get to know the community, the language and to build up links with other teachers and language schools. While both approaches are encouraged in many classrooms around the world, the view is that teachers who know their learners' language and understand their culture have the ability to teach them better than those who don't.

Key factors to consider

Once you have chosen roughly where you are going to do your CertTESOL, it is likely that you will still have a choice between a number of different course providers. The following list of factors will help you to make an informed decision and get the most out of your course:

- **Location:** The more convenient the training centre is to your home/accommodation, the less time you will spend commuting; this time is valuable if you are planning to take an intensive course.

- **Price:** In education, the old adage 'you get what you pay for' tends to be true, but there are exceptions. Things like: quality of trainers, course content, and organisation of timetable can all influence the quality of the course without necessarily affecting the price. Be aware that some course providers do not include Trinity materials in their quoted course price.
- **Reputation:** Word-of-mouth and online recommendations are important influences on our choice of course, so most course providers include trainee testimonials on their websites. If you know someone who has done a CertTESOL, find out if they would recommend the course provider or not. You might also want to Google the name of a potential course provider and find out if there are any independent reviews of the CertTESOL course, or discussions in chat rooms. When you go for your interview (see below), it may be possible to meet some of the trainees on a current course and ask them how they are finding it.
- **Length of course:** A five-week intensive course is more intense than a four-week one, so if you don't work well under pressure, try to take a longer course. The same goes for part-time courses, with courses of 20 weeks or more allowing more time for reading, lesson preparation and learning than the shorter 12-14 week courses.
- **Timetable:** Some full-time courses start on a Monday and finish at around 5pm each day. Others start a little later, around midday, and finish at 8 or 9pm. Many part-time courses include Saturdays; if so, these are not optional. Check your calendar carefully before signing up.
- **Help finding work:** Some course providers boast links to specific employers around the world. In some cases, these are tangible opportunities. In other cases, these may simply be links to recruitment agencies. Find out more and be sceptical of offers of guaranteed employment – you will often do much better yourself!
- **Resources and facilities:** Some course providers will have certain basic resources such as photocopying facilities, computer access and a basic library. In addition to this, larger course providers will usually have cafes, computer labs, longer opening hours and more extensive facilities overall that trainees can benefit from. However, the flipside is that larger organisations may have more bureaucracy, and less opportunity to be flexible on some occasions.
- **Special offers and add-ons:** Some courses include free offers in their prices, such as photocopying allowance or required reading books. Find out about these when making your enquiries. Last-minute discounts may be available at quieter times of the year (usually winter).

Other factors that may influence your choice include: convenience of start dates, trainer qualifications and methodology, all of which should be provided on the course provider's website. There are two less obvious factors that you may also want to enquire about:

- **The pre-course preparation task:** How many hours does it take to complete? What does it involve? Longer tasks may seem less attractive beforehand, but they are likely to provide more thorough preparation, thereby easing the workload on the course itself (see below).
- **The learners in the teaching practice lessons:** Do they pay for the lessons? Do the learners in each group remain the same for the duration of the course? Learners who pay tend to be less forgiving of trainees' mistakes (although they are more likely to attend regularly), and stable groups allow for greater continuity and more positive rapport within the classroom.

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B.2 Applying for a course

The Trinity CertTESOL is open to both native speakers and non-native speakers of English of any nationality. No previous teaching experience or foreign language knowledge is required, although some applicants have these. On many courses there is a combination of both native speakers and non-native speakers, experienced teachers and non-teaching university graduates and retirees, which usually makes for an interesting mixture of skills, expertise and knowledge, to the benefit of all involved.

Different course providers have slightly different requirements for applicants, although all of these must meet Trinity's minimum requirements, which are:

- **Minimum age:** 18 at the start of the course.
- **Level of English:** Non-native speakers of English must either improve or demonstrate a level equivalent to C1 (advanced) on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Approximate indicators of this level include a Trinity ISE III or GESE 10, a score of 7.0 in IELTS in all 4 skills, to pass the Cambridge Advanced Exam or a TOEFL iBT score of about 110. There is no requirement for trainees to speak with a British or other native speaker accent. Trinity encourages diversity in varieties of English.
- **Qualifications:** There are two options here, with the basic requirement being that applicants should have the necessary qualifications to enter higher education, either in the UK or in the applicant's home country. For an applicant from the UK this includes A-levels, national diplomas and other qualifications on Level 3 of the UK National Qualifications Framework. The second option allows course providers to accept applicants without such qualifications if the applicant can demonstrate the required academic study potential to complete the course. Some course providers may have an additional, more extensive interview and test that they use for such applicants. They then make a valid judgement of the applicant's academic study potential based on these.

Course providers reserve the right to add additional requirements or higher standards if they wish, and may also reserve the right to refuse an applicant who does not meet such requirements.

The interview

It is the responsibility of each course provider to verify that each trainee on a CertTESOL course meets the above requirements, has the aptitude to become a successful teacher and is likely to complete the course successfully. For these reasons, all applicants for the Trinity CertTESOL must undergo an interview, usually face-to-face, although the use of Skype and telephone interviews is permitted. A typical interview will include a language awareness task, an on-the-spot, handwritten test of English and a face-to-face interview with a course trainer, lasting anything from 45 minutes to two hours in total. Bear in mind that the purpose of this interview is to assess your suitability for the course, so specific preparation is not normally expected or recommended. Try to relax, be honest and share any initial concerns you have with the trainer. This will help them to make an informed decision on your behalf. If you have any special needs (e.g. a disability) or a learning difficulty (e.g. dyslexia), discuss these with your interviewer and find out if they have the resources to provide any additional support that

you may need. You will be required to show originals of any important qualifications or exam results at interview. Photocopies or scans will not be accepted.

The task usually happens before, or as part of the interview, and feedback on your performance is usually given during the interview itself. You can expect questions on language awareness (e.g. correcting spelling or grammar mistakes, explaining the difference in meaning between similar sentences or identifying similar vowel sounds), and some questions also on teaching (e.g. questions on what you would do in a specific classroom situation or how you would explain the meaning of a word to learners with a low level of English). They do ask you questions on teaching, don't worry if you don't have previous experience. At this point they are evaluating your reasoning skills and creativity. In writing up your answers for the test, make sure your handwriting is clear and your spelling and use of English are 'standard' throughout.

Pause for thought

Try to answer the following example questions that are often asked at interview. You may find it useful to consider how you would answer them before your interview. Use common sense, honesty and experience to guide you:

- 1 Why do you want to take the course?
- 2 What qualities do you have that you think make you a good teacher?
- 3 What previous experience, if any, do you have of coaching, including informal opportunities with family, friends and colleagues?
- 4 What is your personal experience of using foreign languages?
- 5 Which aspects of English do you think cause greatest difficulty for learners and why?
- 6 What are the characteristics of a good language teacher?
- 7 What skills does a language teacher need?
- 8 What would you say are your strengths and weaknesses with using English, both when speaking and in writing?
- 9 What would you say are the advantages and disadvantages of working as an English language teacher?
- 10 How do you think about organising your time, working to deadlines and coping under pressure?

The interview for a course, a two-way process, so it's a good idea to prepare some questions to ask in the interview. Depending on how informative the organisation's website or brochure is, you may want to prepare a few! Double-check what the fees do and don't include, and also course materials and textbooks. See *Choosing your CertTESOL course* above for ideas for other questions.

You are likely to be informed of the outcome of the interview either immediately or soon after. Many course providers require a deposit to secure a place on a specific course. If you do not pass the interview, request clarification on the reasons. The trainer may have specific recommendations for how you can improve any weaknesses or develop required skills before applying for future interviews. You are entitled to apply for interviews with as many course providers as you like.