



Specialist Language Courses

Designing & delivering specialist online ESOL courses for refugee, migrant & asylum seeker learners: the challenges faced & lessons learnt

South West Regional ESOL Network
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Specialist Language Courses

- ✓ Founded 2012
- ✓ Online education provider, specialising in healthcare and test preparation
 - ✓ 25,000+ hours tutoring
 - ✓ 850+ hours digital English language content published
- ✓ Working with refugee and migrant communities since 2018
- ✓ Programmes with East of England, West Midlands, Migration Yorkshire SMPs
- ✓ Also work with Refugee Support Devon, RefuAid, Lincolnshire Refugee Doctor Project, NHS Displaced Talent project

IELTS for work and study



- ✓ Academic English exam
- ✓ Professional registration – GMC, NMC, GDC, GPhC, HCPC, Social Work
England – typically 7.0 overall score
- ✓ Access to Higher Education – undergraduate and masters programmes – most
require between 5.5 and 7.0 overall score

120 – 150 hours tuition

OET for professional registration



**Premium
Preparation
Partner**

- ✓ Healthcare English exam
 - ✓ Professional registration in healthcare – GMC, NMC, GPhC – typically B overall score
 - ✓ Pathway to OSCE, PLAB
- 120 - 150 hours tuition

ESOL integration courses

- ✓ Housing rights
 - ✓ Healthcare literacy
 - ✓ Financial literacy and budgeting
 - ✓ Employment rights
 - ✓ Education in the UK
 - ✓ Driving theory test preparation
- 10 – 12 hours tuition per course

Employability for Overseas Nationals (EON)

Supporting overseas nationals into sustainable work

We offer personalised support from an employment adviser to help you fulfil your potential. This includes:

- 1) CV preparation, cover letters, assistance with applications and interview practice
- 2) Specialist employment adviser for graduates and professional careers, including high skills job search course and mentoring
- 3) Courses to prepare you for IELTS and OET exams
- 4) Assistance to restart a medical career including referrals for medical support worker and clinical attachment roles
- 5) Courses to help you with living in the UK, e.g. on using the NHS, finding housing, budgeting, the English school system and employment rights
- 6) Help with driving theory including an online self-study course
- 7) Professional support from a business adviser if you want to start your own business

Am I eligible?

- Resident in the East of England (Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire)
- Hong Kong BN(O)s
- Former UASC now over 18 with permission to work
- VPRS/VCRS
- Ukrainian guests
- Asylum seekers with permission to work

If we are not the right programme for you we will refer you to the best scheme.



You can contact your local employment adviser or complete the following referral form:

- smp.eelga.gov.uk/migrant-workers/eon/referral-forms
- smp.eelga.gov.uk/migrant-workers/eon/

ESOL for employability / settlement

- ✓ All levels
- ✓ General language focus
- ✓ Tailored to groups – short and long courses
- ✓ Specific workshops on CV writing, application letters, interviews
- ✓ Mastering Communication in Social Care
- ✓ Clinical Communication (care, nursing, medicine)
- ✓ English for Safety (construction, warehousing, waste management)

East of England SMP courses 2023-24

- IELTS - 18 courses, 180 students
- OET - 3 courses, 29 students
- English for employability and settlement: 14 courses, 154 students
- ESOL integration
 - Driving theory prep - 5 courses, 67 students
 - Financial literacy - 2 courses, 13 students
 - Housing rights - 2 courses, 29 students

Key challenges – attendance

- Unstable, stressful circumstances
- Accommodation issues
- Work / family commitments
- Unreliable internet and device access
- Online learning a new experience – phone not ideal

Different course types → different patterns

Some sign up but then never turn up

Overcoming attendance challenges

1. Clear set up

- Clarity of communication with learner and EAs (employment advisors)
 - Logistics, technology
 - Level assessment (British Council EnglishScore)
 - What to expect in the course
 - How to access online materials
- Scheduling and booking
 - Morning and evening classes to give options
 - Allow overbooking to ensure viability

Overcoming attendance challenges

2. Address absenteeism

- Quick reporting and communicating with learner, EA
- Follow up from SLC and EA (employment advisor)
- Address issues case by case, get as much feedback as possible
- Understand any patterns
- Address what we can control, e.g offer alternative course, adjust classroom delivery, give learners recordings to watch
- Apply learnings to rest of course / future courses

Overcoming attendance challenges

3. Mitigate absence by encouraging study and practice outside lessons

- Assignments that are easy to do and can be shared
- Google Classroom integration includes discussion, sharing resources, sharing assignments
- Discuss and share opportunities to practise outside lessons, e.g community centres and support groups
- Set homework tasks that include practising English, such as communication in a shop, library etc

Key challenges - motivation

- Lower-level learners need a long time to achieve required scores
- Some have unclear goals
- Some are frustrated at not being able to resume careers and/or use their talents/experience
- Some haven't been in a classroom for a long time, lack confidence
- Mixed levels can be problematic for lower levels and some groups
- Free courses → less commitment (?), multiple course signups
- Long courses → some attrition inevitable

Overcoming motivation challenges

- Set realistic expectations but within context of future life goals
- Set short- and long-term learning action plans – break longer term goals into manageable, understandable steps
- For mixed levels, provide a safe space for lower levels to practise English e.g peer support groups, breakout rooms, and extra support as needed
- Provide easy-to-do, shareable functional assignments for lower levels to boost confidence, e.g. make a doctor's appointment, go shopping, talk to their neighbour, talk to their child's teacher
- Make learning noticeable / measurable

Key challenges – teaching

Different educational experiences → different classroom expectations

- Teacher- vs student-led learning
- Learner preference for learning facts more than inferring, recognising attitude and opinion (OET and IELTS are ‘western’ exams)
- What learners want vs what they need
- Considerations on materials, e.g. content, imagery, font size

Cultural misunderstandings

- Verbal / non-verbal – communication styles, gesture, eye contact
- Gender, hierarchy, beliefs, family, time, customs
- Understanding the stories / journey / trauma

Overcoming teaching challenges

1. Explain key concepts at the start

- Student-centred approach
- Curriculum focus and design → learning outcomes – the ‘Why?’
- Clarify expectations around study commitments and progress

2. Think about curriculum design

- Inbuilt flexibility to address mixed levels and emerging needs
- Inbuilt learner training – skills building
- Sufficient standardisation to join alternative groups
- Materials that are relevant, inclusive, diverse, non-controversial

Overcoming teaching challenges

3. Create predictable lesson structure

- Routines
- Predictable language and feedback/marking/correction formats
- Include teamwork → build 'community of learning'

4. Ensure an empathic approach

- Emphasise the classroom as a positive, safe learning space
- Listen, acknowledge, discuss, include – don't ignore
- Don't ask too many questions, let learners share their stories
- Liaise with EAs, e.g. to share concerns

Overcoming teaching challenges

5. Support the teachers

- Cultural briefings
- Share access to resources, e.g. background info on conflict, refugee journeys
- Ongoing CPD, peer mentoring, e.g. trauma-informed teaching
- Ongoing dialogue, e.g. WhatsApp group, for teachers to ask questions, share experiences, celebrate success

Successes

- ✓ English for employability and settlement – 75% completion average
- ✓ Test prep courses – 65% completion average
- ✓ IELTS learners make progress of 1 to 1.5 bands
- ✓ OET learners pass rates strong, esp for doctors
- ✓ Significant numbers gaining employment or entering mainstream education
- ✓ Consistently strong feedback from learners and teachers
- ✓ Programmes improve the more they're delivered



Any questions?



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Get in touch

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www.specialistlanguagecourses.com