

Special supplement: the top UK language centres 2024-25

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The wait is finally over

It's the most wonderful time of the year!

Autumn term is now in full swing, which can only mean one thing: it's time for the UK language centre rankings!

For long-time fans of the *Gazette*, and our annual rankings, you may have noticed this issue is out a little later than usual.

Each year, we rely on the British Council accredited centre reports to compile our yearly rankings. However, this year, due to some changes in the accreditation criteria, reports were released later and less frequently than usual.

As a result, this October issue has been pushed back just a little bit to make sure we had as much information as possible in order to create an extensive ranking. You can read more about this in our Special Supplement, starting on page 13.

“Have you considered a Masters in Professional Development for Language Education?”

of ELT over on pages 6 and 7; it's all about the future of English at the International Publishers Exhibition in Greece and the *English in a Changing World* Forum in Türkiye. Also, the Lettori fight continues on page 12.

And, as always, we have an exclusive interview on page 28. Have you considered a Masters in Professional Development for Language Education? Fabio Cerpelloni speaks to NILE's Martyn Clarke about their course and what students can expect to achieve.

With all that out of the way, happy reading, and we hope you enjoy your *EL Gazette*!

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Insights from ELT experts at the International Publishers Exhibition

Aleksandra Popovski and Debra Suarez discuss the ELT profession and teachers associations at IPE Athens.

Back in September, *EL Gazette* attended the International Publishers Exhibition (IPE), the biggest Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) materials exhibition in Greece and Cyprus.

As they celebrate 40 years of FLT promotion, Athens' Autumn IPE was bursting with game-changers and innovators in the ELT sector, and hosted a cornucopia of publishers, exam boards and stakeholders.

What stood out at IPE was the way the event puts teachers first; IPE is free to attend, making it accessible to anyone looking for a chance to speak with some of the biggest names in ELT publishing with a chance to attend inspiring talks and presentations from international speakers.

The highlight of Athens' Autumn IPE was the first evening's round table discussion, 'The Future of English Language & The Sustainability of Teachers Associations', featuring key speakers Aleksandra Popovski, President of IATEFL, and Debra Suarez, President of TESOL International. Moderating the talk was George Korpas, President of TESOL Gulf.

Where do we go from here?

The discussion kicked off with the question of emerging trends in the ELT profession. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a common thread was Artificial Intelligence, however, the overall tone was more hopeful and understanding than negative.

'Debra, on the topic of professional development in technology, suggested we desperately need to address teachers' confidence with, and willingness to use, AI:

'We are the ones creating the field of ELT,' she said. 'AI is not something that is *happening* to us, but it is something that we are creating, and it starts with confidence.'

Aleksandra, adding on to educators' experiences with AI,

also urged for teachers to talk more openly about the technology, what it is, its ethical issues, and how to use it properly and effectively.

'Nobody talks about teachers' and students' AI literacy,' she said. 'Why are we using AI tools? What is the purpose of AI in education? We are no longer dealing with traditional literacy, but also digital and multi-modal literacy.'

While discussing trends, Debra and Aleksandra also brushed on globalisation, talking about it in more detail as the speakers were asked about Global Citizenship. Aleksandra spoke candidly, touching on her experiences growing up.

'As a refugee, my language of communication was English,' she said. 'It opened doors for me and was the only way I could make friends and get an education. English saved me.'

Aleksandra went on, describing English as a valuable tool that can knock down borders, both physically and educationally. It can foster understanding, empathy and humility as a bridge between different cultures, customs and languages. She concluded by pointing out that, in a room full of people of various nationalities, English was what connected them all in that moment.

From the other perspective, Debra talked about focussing on 'decolonising' and creating 'cultural humility' with global citizenship.

'We can't talk about globalisation without also elevating the local context,' she said. 'Globalisation could be seen as a linguistic, imperialist spread of English. So, how can we take pedagogies and methodologies brought in from other areas and make them our own based on our own students' needs?'

Debra suggests starting from within our own classrooms. She says teachers can show students that global citizenship is how we are as individuals with the rest of



the world, rather than imposing ourselves on others.

Expanding upon experiences in the classroom, Aleksandra and Debra also broached the subject of challenges facing teachers in today's world, including teacher wellbeing and working conditions.

Both speakers agreed teachers are unappreciated and unsupported, needing more than just a 'lit candle and a yoga mat' to address declining morale and mental health. They also agreed teachers need more support when seeking professional development, allowing them the room to grow and improve.

Support for educators could also come from teaching associations; as presidents of IATEFL and TESOL International, Aleksandra and Debra moved the topic on to maintaining members and engagement in teaching associations. They both agreed that the longevity of associations comes from listening to its members and maintaining a strong leadership.

'Associations are made up of all of us,' said Debra. 'We get community, we get advocacy; we are no longer just one voice,

but hundreds and thousands of voices.'

Aleksandra added: 'We are bringing all of these teachers together from different parts of the world. It is very important to understand that associations can do so much because of the power that we all bring to the community.'

The round table discussion concluded with reluctance, the room clearly entranced by the expertise of the speakers and ready to hear more. If not for time constraints, it was clear Aleksandra, Debra and the audience could have talked, with passion, for many more hours.

As the audience made their way from the room—some sticking behind to talk more with Debra and Aleksandra—there was a real feeling that everyone walked away with something to ruminate on, and more knowledge to bring back to their students or institutions.

Although IPE is now finished, running a total of six events in Greece, Cyprus and Albania this year alone, the Athens' event has left its guests and the *Gazette* ready and waiting for what might be coming in 2025.

English in a Changing World

Attending the recent forum in Türkiye, Wayne Trotman reports on the insights into the past, present and future of English language education.

In November, 2015 I had the pleasure of attending and reporting for the *Gazette* on the rollout of the British Council report, 'The state of English in higher education in Turkey'.

Ten years, and several further insightful reports later, including a recent one in 2023 on *artificial intelligence*, I was again delighted to accept the invitation to the British Council Türkiye *English in a Changing World Forum* which would take stock of all such reports and assess impact along with outcomes achieved.

'It's a forum, and not a conference,' Ayşen Güven, British Council Director Education Türkiye explained to me over lunch on Day One. 'We've invited key partners and collaborators, both local and international, to help us reflect on progress we've made in the past decade and highlight goals to guide us towards an even better future.'

Highly placed figures were certainly evident throughout the two-day event, held in the Ankara Hilton. These included: Dr Yusuf Akbaş, Deputy General Director, Teacher Training and Development Directorate, Ministry of National Education; Professor Güven Sak, President of TEPAV, The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Türkiye; and TESOL Türkiye President, Evrim Üstünlüoğlu. Also in attendance was Chris Graham, Vice-President IATEFL, and Sezin Dereci Kösem, Sabancı Foundation Programme Manager.

Opening the proceedings, Country Director for British Council Türkiye, Gill Caldicott pointed out that the British Council was celebrating 90 years since its inception; and its 84th year in Turkey.

'Last year alone,' she explained, 'we delivered more than 30,000 exams, and 23,000 teachers accessed Teaching English, which provides support for teachers of English. An example of what we know is significant demand for English and we believe a very real need for the country to build on its already impressive potential.'

Following this, Ayşen Güven, recently awarded an MBE for, in the words of the UK Ambassador to Türkiye, '...transforming the way English teaching is delivered in Turkey,' set out the context:

'The main purpose of the forum is to assess the impact of reports and subsequent projects related to 2013 and 2015 surveys into the condition of English in state schools and higher education respectively, and by using our forces and working collectively, to shape the priority areas of work which can lead to innovative, scalable, impactful and sustainable partnerships.'

The first of the three scheduled panels on Day One explored what changes had been made in terms of technology, along with the needs of the labour market and the demand for English.

Dr Işıl Boy Ergül, founder of a digital ELT company in Türkiye known as Teacher X and ETZ, explained how AI, far from being a tool, was in fact a new dimension, explaining that claims for a teacherless classroom were baseless as learning coaches were still required in the room. 'AI,' she concluded, 'is able to enhance learning, but could never replace it.'

The second panel discussed systems to support better English language outcomes for learners.

Didem Mutçaliçoğlu, President of the Accreditation Board—another valued partner with the British Council, and known in Türkiye as DEDAK—explained that in order to support learner outcomes there was a need for interconnected systems that rely on consistency and alignment. She concluded that 'currently we do not have the right system.'

On the same panel, Richard Spiby, Head of Assessment, English Language Research British Council, explained the necessity of working in a triangle consisting of curriculum, delivery, assessment, and not treating assessment as a single entity. He felt there was an urgent need for assessment literacy.

It was also encouraging to hear from Professor Bayram Ali



Ersay, President of the Centre for Assessment, Selection and Placement (known in Türkiye as ÖSYM), who outlined a soon-to-be introduced computer-based test in Türkiye known as E-TEP, and who, in his opening speech, said '...we aim to create areas where we can learn from each other by closely following the work being done in the field of language assessment internationally and by communicating with different practitioners.'

Following a scrumptious lunch, over which all participants discussed points raised, panel three on Supporting Teachers, moderated by Andy Hockley, took place.

Panellist Evrim Üstünlüoğlu explained how she believed professional development on a macro-level needed to be more meaningful and based on data, while on a micro-level it should involve learning opportunities and mentoring programmes.

Chris Graham of IATEFL felt the less motivated members of the ELT community should be encouraged more, and plenty of online material for them was available. More urgently, he energetically stated his policy of 'No teacher left behind'. Far too many teachers are underprivileged by living in rural areas with low connectivity, poor resources plus low English levels, he believed.

Day Two began with a round-up by moderators of issues arising on Day One, during which Andy Hockley advocated a smoother transition for language students from the prep' year to faculty classes, while both Evrim Üstünlüoğlu and Richard Spiby encouraged the coming together of stakeholders to assist with this.

Sustainable Futures, the final panel, was devoted to partnership models for equitable English language education. Sezin Dereci Kösem spoke of The Sabancı Foundation, which supported the British Council's 'English Together' project, focusing on empowering teachers, regardless of gender. Along with the previous three, there were certainly plenty of clear issues from this panel for the British Council to work on in the near future.

During the evening closing reception at The British Embassy, kindly sponsored by ELT publishers Macmillan and Macenta, UK Ambassador to Türkiye, Jill Morris, shared her delight with all, explaining how during a recent visit to a local school, young Turkish pupils there had enlightened her in excellent English on artificial intelligence; evidence, if needed, of the work of The British Council, and that language teaching and learning programmes in Turkey are in good hands.

Never too old to start

Language learning protects against dementia.

Language learning improves cognitive function, especially cognitive flexibility, in the over 65s, according to a Dutch study by Jelle Brouwer and colleagues at the University of Groningen.

The proportion of the population over 65 in most countries is increasing as life expectancy increases and birth rates decline. Unfortunately, this phase of life is often accompanied by chronic ill health, one of these challenges being cognitive decline and dementia.

Life experiences which can reduce the risk or delay the onset of dementia include having more education and/or a challenging and stimulating job. Basically, the more cognitive stimulation a person has throughout life, the lower the risk.

One of the ways this might work is by increasing 'cognitive reserve'. This is like having more money in the bank so that when the bills start coming in it takes longer to go bankrupt. What is less clear, is whether cognitive stimulation later in life can still be effective.

Learning a language is cognitively taxing and people who speak more than one language have been reported to delay the onset of Alzheimer's by several years. Jelle's study sought to establish whether language learning in later life could still improve cognitive function and consequently enlarge cognitive reserves.

During the pandemic, 43 monolingual Dutch speakers aged 65-78 were recruited, from February 2021 to November 2022. Due to the ongoing restrictions, all parts of the study were conducted online, apart from some tests which were sent by post.

The monolingual criterion was set at using Dutch for at least 80% of the time—not so straightforward in a region where 26-40% of people also speak a local minority language.

Participants were randomly split into three groups, each receiving an intervention lasting three months. Group 1 received communication-focused English language teaching for 1-1.5 hours every fortnight.



Group 2 were given guitars and had music lessons 1-1.5 hours every fortnight. Both Groups 1 and 2 also had 45 minutes of home study every day. Learning and playing music is well-documented as protecting against cognitive decline and the underpinning brain areas involved overlap with those supporting language learning. Jelle was interested to see how the two interventions compared.

Group 3 had a series of 30-minute lectures on wide ranging topics such as, sign language and animal-assisted therapy. These lectures were followed by online group discussions on the topic but there was no further self-study. This was a relatively low-activity intervention making this the control group, providing a baseline for comparison.

Participants were tested before and after the interventions, then four months later to see how long-lasting any effects might be. Tests included English proficiency and a battery of cognitive tests including global cognition, cognitive flexibility, episodic and working memory and attention.

Participants in both the language and music intervention groups showed improvements in cognitive function, especially cognitive

flexibility and episodic memory compared to those attending the lecture series. There was very little difference between the two interventions in terms of outcomes, but the language group made greater gains in cognitive flexibility.

Given the small final sample size and multiple tests, it is not surprising that most of the comparisons were not significantly different. Recruitment required a long list of exclusions that, if present, could confound the results, such as: any history of cognitive, psychological or neurological problems; more than B2 level English; regularly playing music of any kind. Alongside the inevitable drop-out rate, this reduced the original enrolment from 199 to 43.

It was never very likely that differences between two positive interventions could be clarified with so few participants.

However, it is encouraging that language learning appears to be as effective as learning to play a musical instrument in improving cognitive skills in this age group and might even be better for improving cognitive flexibility.

The authors point out that if these interventions were extended, it would be important

to maintain the level of cognitive challenge over time as individuals became more skilled at either language or music.

Another interesting finding was that participants with lower baseline cognitive scores at the beginning of the study tended to improve more after all interventions. Furthermore, improvements in language proficiency did not predict improvement in cognitive flexibility. This suggests that learners making less progress with the language learning itself still get the benefit to cognitive function.

The debate over the influence of age on language learning continues, but whether older people genuinely find language learning more challenging or not, the results of this study show that it is still very worthwhile to try.

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Teach your children well

First language literacy skills enhance second language learning.

Early enhancement of reading skills in Spanish translates to improved English literacy, according to a study by Raul Gutiérrez-Fresneda and colleagues at the Universities of Alicante and Málaga in Spain.

The participants in this study were 386 Spanish six- to seven-year-olds, just starting formal school in the region of Valencia. Children in these schools have a standard curriculum for both Spanish and English from their first year.

Learners were divided into two groups; the first group of 195 were given three 50-minute sessions per week for 16 weeks designed to enhance literacy skills in Spanish. These sessions aimed to stimulate phonological and syntactical awareness, increase vocabulary and speed up word recognition.

Early sessions, for example, practiced distinguishing known phonemes by sound and rapid naming of everyday objects. The

last sessions included tasks such as giving titles to short stories and expanding on sort sentences.

A second group of 191 learners followed the usual curriculum without the literacy intervention.

Both groups of students were tested before and after the intervention period and one year later. Tests included an assessment of phonemic awareness and an evaluation of reading skills in both Spanish and English. The core reading skills assessed were decoding, fluency and comprehension.

The results showed that gains in all skills in both Spanish and English were significantly greater in the intervention group and the differences were maintained at the one-year follow-up assessments. The effect sizes ranged from moderate (phonemic awareness) to large (reading fluency and comprehension)—impressive for a four-month intervention.

It appears that increasing reading skills in the first language

(Spanish) improved literacy skills in the second language (English). Although these languages may seem relatively similar, Spanish is a much more transparent language—meaning words can be more easily decoded letter by letter—than English, with its infamous inconsistencies and exceptions.

This makes the transfer of literacy skills especially interesting and not something that could be assumed. The authors suggest that, in general, exposure to more than one language may expand literacy skills more generally.

Another implication from this study is that second language proficiency can be strongly influenced by the quality of education in the learners' first language, independent of individual differences in otherwise innate abilities.

Setting up young children with strong foundations in their first language can have a long-lasting impact on their success



in other languages. Where such foundations have been lacking, perhaps further interventions for second language learners could close the gap.

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Quo Vadis, EAP?

Professor Douglas Bell, author of a recent book 'English for Academic Purposes. Perspectives on the Past, Present and Future' reflects on a quarter century of his international involvement in EAP.

My professional involvement in the field of English for Academic Purposes dates back to the late 1990s, when I accepted a position as an EAP tutor and textbook writer at Bilkent University in Turkey.

While it is now quite sobering for me to reflect that this first foray into EAP took place more than a quarter century ago, I might also conclude that in many ways I have never looked back. Since that time, I have gone on to hold a wide variety of EAP-related positions in the UK, Australia, and most recently, the Peoples' Republic of China.

What this very long involvement in EAP has given me is a genuine and abiding personal and professional interest in the different ways in which the field has developed, the various issues and challenges it has faced and the likely direction of its future travel.

My ongoing critical reflections on each of these areas originally inspired my doctoral thesis, *'Practitioners, Pedagogies and Professionalism in English for Academic Purposes (EAP): The Development of a Contested Field'* and have more recently prompted me to write a new book, *'English for Academic Purposes. Perspectives on the Past, Present and Future'*.

In this short article, I will discuss several of the themes my book explores and as the title *'Quo Vadis, EAP?'* suggests, open the wider question of where EAP as a discipline might be heading.

Perhaps one of the first things I should say is that one of the more forgiving aspects for anyone attempting to chart the historical development of EAP is that, thanks to the field still being relatively young, the task of mapping out its trajectory remains reasonably manageable.

When I was carrying out the research for my doctoral thesis, for example, I had been keen to gather the views of key individuals who had been involved in EAP

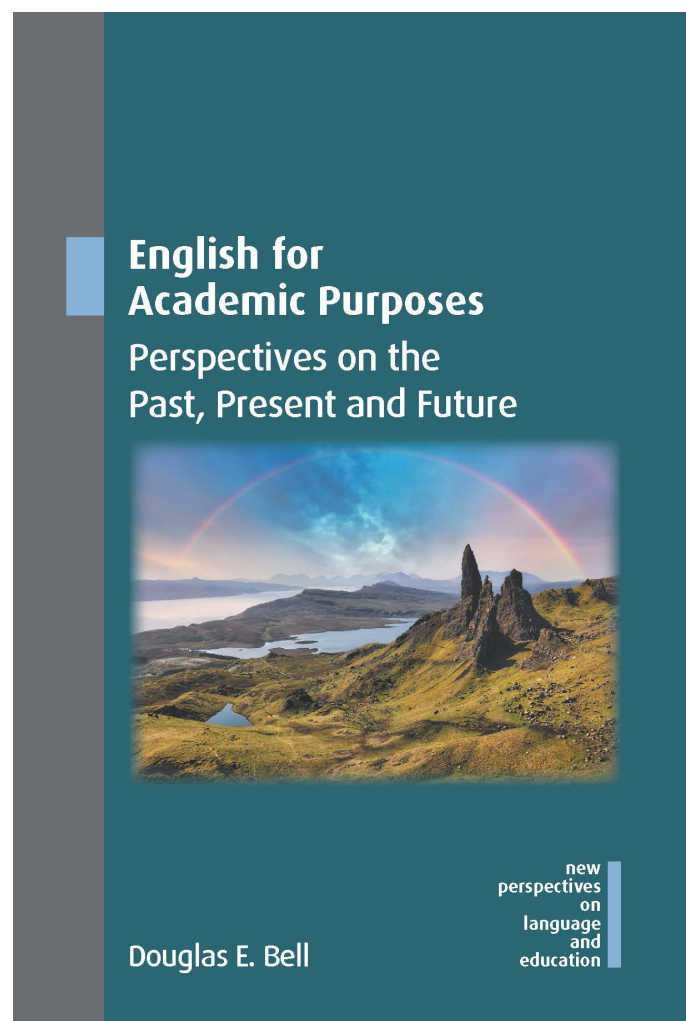
teaching across the entire range of its history. I had therefore settled on 15 high profile international participants grouped to represent four different decades: the '60s to '70s; '70s to '80s; '80s to '90s; and finally the '90s up to present day.

In a series of qualitative interviews, each participant was duly asked to share their experiences of teaching EAP, their motivations for joining the field in the first place, the things that they felt might make EAP different from other forms of English Language teaching, the knowledge, skills and competencies that they would consider necessary in order for someone to claim expertise, the role of EAP-specific qualifications, the importance of continuing professional development, and finally, their views on where EAP as a discipline ultimately might be heading.

The rich qualitative data which emerged from these interviews duly formed the backbone of my doctoral thesis and allowed me to make several claims about the nature of EAP expertise, pedagogy and professional practice.

In 2023, some seven years on from the completion of my PhD, I decided that it might be interesting for me to revisit some of those claims and try to gather more updated perspectives. The interviews I subsequently carried out with three of my original informants have thus helped to inform many of the critical perspectives I now share in my book.

In terms of EAP's developmental trajectory, I must say that one of the things which came as quite an eye-opener for me was the highly recursive nature of the field. While delving into the very early academic literature, for example, I was surprised to find that several issues which had been flagged as problematic and in need of urgent attention in the 1970s, '80s and '90s are still being talked about today. This suggests a very strong



sense of history repeating itself and, in a few cases, the same wheels being reinvented.

I speculate on some of the possible reasons for this in my book, but it seems to me that the ongoing lack of standard entry routes into EAP and recognised preparatory benchmarks and qualifications are probably a major contributor. After all, if there is no universally-shared picture of what EAP now is, or how one should formally train to become a practitioner, then it stands to reason that the knowledge and skills base of the discipline will continue to be patchy and contested.

This is not to suggest of course that disciplinary knowledge

should in any way be monolithic or expected to remain static, but unless there is an agreed collective understanding of a discipline's history, the challenges it has faced in its development and the various skillsets that qualified practitioners are supposed to possess, it then begs the question of how new entrants should go about developing their knowledge, skills and expertise. In most professional walks of life, after all, in order for people to know where they are going, it is first necessary for them to learn about where they have come from.

In this regard, most other established professions do generally tend to have an agreed knowledge



By necessity, this very short article has naturally only scratched the surface of the many important issues currently facing EAP. However, in closing, I would reiterate my strong belief that the six or so decades of EAP's existence do represent extremely rich ground for discussion and critical analysis. I hope that the different perspectives I share in my new book will stimulate further thinking and prove to be a catalyst for this.

'English for Academic Purposes' is available to purchase on Multilingual Matters: www.multilingual-matters.com

base with clearly marked pathways for new entrants. It is universally recognized, for example, that someone wishing to become a doctor, a dentist, an engineer or a lawyer must first complete a series of professional qualifications and go through a standardized cycle of preparation.

In the case of EAP, however, this is still very far from the case with entry points to the discipline continuing to remain vague and mostly unregulated. As I discuss at length in my book, it can be argued that this vagueness and

permeability of EAP as a field has had several unfortunate knock-on effects with regard to its wider status and how it is perceived vis a vis other disciplines in the academy.

Another point I would like to stress about EAP is that like many other disciplines within Higher Education, it is currently in a state of considerable flux. As I discuss in my book, this contemporary period of EAP's development continues to be impacted by global issues such as the pandemic, the massive

recent expansion of artificial intelligence, changing attitudes to the role of Higher Education in general and widely fluctuating trends around international student mobility.

In the UK context, the significant expansion of private EAP providers in recent years has been another significant change to the previous landscape and important questions still remain on the wider effects that this will continue to have on EAP's recognition and status within the academy.



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Lettori fight continues in the ECHR

David Petrie reports on the recent developments in the fight to secure damages for foreign lecturers in Italy.

Lawyers acting for ALLSI, the Association of Foreign Lecturers in Italy, have lodged a case, 8 August 2024, with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, seeking damages totalling €352,450 for violation of the right to a fair trial, under Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and violation of the right to a fair trial on the grounds of unreasonable duration.

Two British lecturers, Robert Coates and Dermot Costello (who also holds Irish citizenship) were first employed by the University of Brescia in 1986. They were paid less than their Italian colleagues and consistently less than that stipulated by the legal framework (Italian law 63 of 2004) approved by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) on 18 July 2006 as having the potential to remove the illegitimate discrimination based on nationality that the Court had found in 2001.

Thirty-three miles to the west of Brescia lies the University of Bergamo, where colleagues employed there under the same legal framework as the Brescia two are being paid more than double and are also receiving pension and social security contributions commensurate with law 63 of 2004.

Thirty-six miles to the west of Bergamo is the University of Milan, where 33 lecturers accepted €5.4 million in compensation and the dispute was closed.

Mr Coates and Mr Costello, and indeed hundreds of their colleagues throughout Italy, have been let down both by their employers who deny liability, and by inconsistent and contradictory rulings in Italy's lumbering courts.

In 2011 a Brescia labour court awarded them damages totalling €282,811 for arrears on unpaid wages, in line with law 63 of 2004 and the case law of the CJEU.

However, the University of Brescia appealed, citing the so-called Gelmini law of 2011 and subsequent supplementary measures retroactively reinterpreting and leapfrogging the binding judgments of the CJEU of 2001 and 2006.

When there appears to be a conflict between EU law and national law, Article 267 of the EU Treaty stipulates that a lower court 'may' refer the case to the CJEU for a preliminary ruling on how the law is to be interpreted, and that a final court 'against whose decisions there is no judicial remedy under national law', that court or tribunal 'shall' bring the matter before the Court.

Despite the request by our lawyer, Professor Lorenzo Picotti of the Verona Bar, who has successfully pled two foreign lecturers cases in the CJEU, both the Brescia Court of Appeal and the Court of Cassation refused to refer to the CJEU. It is this refusal that prematurely blocks their access to a fair trial along with the unreasonable duration of the trials that were first brought in 1994 that forms the substance of the present application to the ECHR for damages.

Professor Avv. Picotti issued the following statement:

'It is important and necessary to refer the matter to the European Court of Human Rights, because national judges are not applying European Union law nor the judgments of the Court of Justice. This can be evidenced by the fact that the European Commission has had to initiate a third liability case against Italy to deal with the ongoing discriminatory treatment of foreign mother-tongue lecturers in Italy; the seventh case since 1989 that the CJEU will adjudicate.

'It is very serious indeed that not even the Court of Cassation has requested the Court of Justice itself for a preliminary interpretation of the rules in question. For this reason it is essential to get a



judgment from the Strasbourg Court, as the guarantor of the rights of citizens, who can directly appeal under the Convention and get a pronouncement on this persistent unfairness.'

This new dimension in the European Court of Human Rights will present Italy with a massive headache of its own making. The European Court of Human Rights considers two years duration in normal cases to be reasonable. The Coates and Costello case has now lasted for two decades.

Worse, Italy now risks a plethora of compensation applications to the Strasbourg Court from foreign lecturers similarly tied up for years in Italy's dis-functioning courts in Bologna, Catania, Florence, Naples, Milan IULM, Pisa, Roma, Florence, Salento, Siena, Venice and Verona.

Successive Italian governments have shown a willingness to introduce retroactive legislation in order to influence the outcome of scores of legal cases that are pending. Alarm bells should

be ringing at the offices of the European Union: Italy, a founder member of the EU, is turning its back on a rules-based legal order.

Governments of the United Kingdom have been conspicuous in their support for British lecturers in Italy, with the former UK Minister David Lidington describing Italy's behaviour as 'both immoral and illegal.'

At a meeting in the Rome Embassy on 29 July 2024, British Ambassador Edward Llewellyn pledged his support. We are seeking a meeting with the Minister in the UK Cabinet Office for relations with the EU, Nick Thomas-Symonds, who met us in Westminster in 2017 along with his constituent, Ms Judith Evans, who is now fully compensated by the University of Bergamo.



David Petrie is chair of ALLSI, the Association of Foreign Lecturers in Italy.

The UK language centre rankings 2024-25

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The Olympics of UK language centres

It's that time of year again! We take a look at the top UK accredited centres for 2024-25.

Welcome to the 2024 EL Gazette Rankings! Flicking through the pages, regular rankings readers will notice two main differences: there are fewer pages of rankings than normal and fewer new Centres of Excellence.

In fact, there are just six new names appearing in our rankings this year, two of whom are former CoEs, so a warm welcome back to University of Plymouth Marjon and Severn Vale Academy.

We also have two Young Learners operations entering for the first time: Bell St Albans and Peartree English Language Experience and Activity, a joint venture between a Cardiff language centre and the prestigious boarding school, UW Atlantic College.

Last but not least, we have two longstanding year round language schools: Kent School of English and Kensington Academy.

Why are there so few new CoEs? Well, the short answer is that, since 2021, most centres have opted for Compliance Inspections, where no new areas of strength are given—therefore, no new CoEs emerge. For more information on this, check out the analysis over on page 22.

From the beginning of this year, however, all centres must undergo a Full Inspection. The torrent of work this entails has taken its toll on the British Council team, with the normal monthly publication of the summary statements slowing—none were issued for August, and there was at least one case where we have two vastly different Full Reports issued for the same school within a ten month period. This is why we've had to delay ranking them this year, until we were able to find out what on earth was going on!

What readers may not notice in a quick flick through, however, is that, for the first time in a decade or more, we have added a new algorithm to the rankings in an attempt to even out the differences between the new criteria for the area of 'Academic staff profile' introduced this year, compared to old reports. For more on why we did this, and how we did it, you can read more on pages 16 and 17.

Finally for those who may be fed up with the *Gazette* going on about teachers and teaching, Director of Bridge Mill's Galway Language Centre, Patrick Creed's piece on page 25 delves deep into the secrets of excellence in management.

So, without further ado, read on for this year's UK Language Centre Rankings!

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Where in the UK will you find a Centre of Excellence?

editorial@elgazette.com

The new rankings explained

How have the rankings changed this year? Read on for a full explanation...

This introduction of new inspections standards for Academic Staff Profiles in 2024 poses a major problem for the *Gazette* rankings; the new standards are so different that we have had to redesign our rankings, to reduce the disadvantage posed to centres inspected before 2024.

The old system covered educational level (degree or equivalent), teacher qualification level (approved initial training or fully qualified), and academic management teacher qualification. Most of this could easily be checked on the accompanying data.

This fits in with the standard approach to measuring teacher qualification in mainstream education research and are generally correlated with better teaching quality, even at pre-school level (see box for details).

The new system ignores educational level altogether and accepts non-standard initial training, plus other professional qualifications.

It does, though, still insist on fully qualified academic management.

Inspectors are now asked to decide whether the qualifications and experience of the teaching team are 'appropriate', 'largely appropriate', or 'clearly appropriate' to the particular context—a much more subjective measurement.

It can also result in inspection comments which are likely to be incomprehensible to the average non-English speaker. We ran the example below, taken from a recent inspection, through a CEFR level checker—it was judged as C2 (IELTS 8+):

Example one

'The academic staff team has a professional profile (qualifications and experience) that is appropriate to the school's context. The recruitment and support policy is effectively devised and implemented in line with the stated course objectives and the student profile.'

In a new, more nuanced, but more subjective system, can we be sure

that a centre which received an area of strength for academic staff profile under the new system would have achieved one under the old? The example below suggests not:

Example two

In March 2024, a large chain-owned language school, specialising in general English for students aged 16+ received an Area of Strength in Academic Staff Profile. All the teachers are recorded as having a standard Initial Teaching qualifications but none were fully qualified. Their educational attainment is not mentioned. The team profile was judged '*clearly appropriate to the organisation's context*'.

In March 2019, a school belonging to the same organisation was not awarded a strength in this area under the old system, even though three of its teachers were fully qualified, the other 16 all had standard Initial Training, and 80% of them were educated to degree level.

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Same chain, same course materials, same curriculum, same student age groups and nationalities. Apart from the towns in which they are located, there is nothing different about the contexts, but the school with more highly qualified teachers scored lower under the old system, than its sister schools, with slightly less qualified teachers, scored under the new.

Were our rankings to give equal weight to the teacher quality as measured under the new criteria—as we give to those awarded before 2024—it could negatively affect the ranking position of centres inspected before that date.

To avoid this, we looked for another variable which, educational research suggests, is closely correlated to **teacher** quality. The answer is **teaching** quality (as measured by classroom observation). Across cultures and in all educational contexts, including for students as young as three, the teaching observed is likely to be better where teachers are fully qualified graduates.

This seems to hold true in UK EFL where state sector colleges and universities demand higher qualifications and educational levels than those mandated by the British council inspections. They are also more likely to be awarded areas of strength in teaching based on classroom observation.

Some 83% of state sector FE colleges and some 86% of university language centres were awarded an area of strength in teaching. The figure in private language schools is just 25%.

Statistical analysis

To confirm our hypothesis that higher teaching qualifications are likely to lead to better observed teaching we ran a statistical analysis of the entire *Gazette* dataset of inspection outcomes (see box).

We found a positive correlation between teacher qualifications and teaching quality across all sectors. Correlation is not causation, but while the BC criteria for teacher quality has been changed, the criteria for teaching quality has not. Therefore, centres which are strong in both Academic Staff Profiles and Observed are more likely to be of consistent quality regardless of the educational context.

The simplest way of reducing the variation between the two systems was to create an algorithm to adjust the ranking score providing a slight uplift for centres which are strong in both teaching and Academic Staff Profile. As a result, some entries score slightly lower than in previous years and some slightly higher. However, since the difference is less than a full point, in most cases they remain in the same percentile ranking as before.

Centres with both areas of strength are marked with † on our rankings. As you will notice from the table on page 19, every single centre in the top 3% in the UK is marked thusly.

A systematic review conducted in 2017 by Manning et al. found that teacher qualification level is positively associated with teaching quality. This was based on 48 eligible studies, spanning a diverse range of definitions for teaching quality and teacher qualifications, conducted across a variety of early years educational settings and regions of the world.

To investigate if this relationship persists in UK English Language schools, we specified a linear regression model. We selected British Council assessments in teaching strength as the response variable, and British Council assessments in academic staff profile as the explanatory variable. The sample included all 371 British Council Accredited Centres.

We found a highly statistically significant, medium strength positive relationship between academic staff profile and teaching score. A reported R^2 value of 0.167 approximates that a change in assessed teaching quality is explained to a degree of 16.7% by the academic staff profile of teachers. A p-value of 0.000 confirms that there is an extremely low probability these findings are down to chance. Hence, we can assume with confidence that in our sample, more highly-qualified teachers are correlated with higher teaching quality in UK ELT.

Repeated experiments focused on specific types of centres such as universities and language schools, and returned almost identical values, indicating the relationship persists across varied educational settings.

Whilst these findings align with widely accepted literature on the topic, they assume the British Council's reports are an entirely accurate reflection of teaching and academic staff quality across UK English language schools.

REFERENCE

■ Manning, M., et al. (2017), *The relationship between teacher qualification and the quality of the early childhood education and care environment*. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 13: 1–82. <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2017.1>



Working out the rankings

Read on to see what we use to calculate the top UK language centres.

Our rankings are based on the inspection results given in 15 areas, for centres which take under 18s, or 14 areas for those that don't. The names of all 15 areas are listed vertically at the top of the rankings table.

Each area is marked under a set number of criteria ranging in number between four and eight. Each criterion is given one of three judgements: 'not met', 'met', or 'strong'.

- An 'area of strength' is given where at least 50% of the criteria are marked 'strong' and no single criterion is marked 'not met'.
- A 'need for improvement' is given where 50% of criteria is marked 'not met'.

In the column under each area, scores are marked in a box:

1 = a strength in that area.

-1 = a need for Improvement.

Where the box is empty, the centre met the requirements.

The scores are normally based on the 'summary statements' that list of areas of strength and needs for improvement for every school. These are usually published monthly, but where these are missing, we rely on full reports.

Our algorithm makes adjustments for the fact that the British Council will accredit centres with negative scores, and also—due to a change this year on the criteria for 'Academic staff profile'—an adjustment to correct any disadvantage posed to who were inspected under the

old system, and those in the state sector (see page 16 for more details).

Centres which have a strength in both staff profile and teaching are marked with a †—you will see that every centre in the top 5% of the rankings table has this mark.

The scores are calculated in percentages of the perfect score, but published as marks out of 10. The top seven centres have all scored 100%, shown in the table as a 10.00. In other words, a centre scoring 9.50 on our table has 95% of all available points.

You will notice that some centres have scores like 6.32 or 7.89; this is primarily caused by a difference in number of areas inspected and/or the weighting for teacher qualify plus teaching quality.

This year, all centres are in the same percentile ranking, for example, the top 8%, even though there might be a 0.7 point difference in the mark between the top centre in that per centile and the bottom.

So, with all the technical stuff out of the way, it's time to take a closer look at the rankings tables, starting on the opposite page!





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Centre of Excellence
2024 - 2025

Percentile	Score	Institution	Type	Strategic and quality management	Staff management	Student administration	Publicity	Premises and facilities	Learning resources	Academic staff profile	Academic management	Course design	Learner management	Teaching	Care of students	Accommodation	Leisure opportunities	safeguarding under 18s
PERFECT SCORES	10.00	†ELC Bristol*	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	10.00	†English Language Centre, Chester, The	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	10.00	†English Language Centre, Brighton, The	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	10.00	†LSI, Portsmouth*	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	10.00	†London School of English, The	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	10.00	†Summer Boarding Courses, Shipley*	PLS:Y SS	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	10.00	†Wimbledon School of English*	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
TOP 3%	9.50	†Bell International Cambridge*	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	9.50	†Bell Young Learners- Multicentre	PLS:Y SS	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	9.50	†Broadstairs English Centre	PLS:Y+A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
TOP 5%	9.00	†International House London	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.95	†University of Manchester	Uni	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.95	†University of Sheffield	Uni	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
TOP 8%	8.50	Bishopstrow College, Warminster*	PLS:Y BS	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.50	Chichester College	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.50	East Sussex College, Lewes and Eastbourne	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.50	†International House Bristol*	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.50	†INTO Manchester	Pathway	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.50	ISCA School of English*	PLS:Y SS	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.50	†King's Foundation, King's College London	Uni	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.50	†Loxdale English Centre	PLS:Y+A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.50	†NILE Norwich	TT	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.50	†Peartree ELEA, NEW	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.50	†St. Giles International, Brighton	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.50	†St. Giles International, Central London	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.42	†Plymouth Marjon University, NEW	Uni	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

KEY

1 = strength
 -1 = need for improvement
 NA = not applicable
 Blank = met the standard
 † = high quality teaching
 * = compliance report

Biz Business and professional training centre
 BS Boarding school
 FE Further education college
 TT Teacher training specialist
 PLS:A Private language school primarily accepting adults 16+
 PLS:Y+A Private language school catering for both adults and young learners
 PLS:Y BS Private language boarding school primarily catering for young learners under 16
 PLS:Y SS Private language summer school primarily catering for young learners under 16
 Uni University
 PWay Pathway

The information in this table is based on the latest Summary Statements for each centre as of 13 September 2024 and any compliance report where applicable. The Summary Statement can be found on page 1 of the full report for every accredited centre. These can be found at britishcouncil.org/education/accreditation/centres.

UK RANKINGS 2024-2025

Percentile	Score	Institution	Type	Strategic and quality management	Staff management	Student administration	Publicity	Premises and facilities	Learning resources	Academic staff profile	Academic management	Course design	Learner management	Teaching	Care of students	Accommodation	Leisure opportunities	safeguarding under 18s
TOP 10%	8.00	†BEET Language Centre	PLS:A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			1	
	8.00	Discovery Summer, London	PLS:Y SS	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1			1	1	1
	8.00	EF International Bournemouth	PLS:A	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1		1		1	1
	8.00	EF International Oxford	PLS:A	1	1	1		1	1		1	1	1		1	1	1	1
	8.00	English Language Centre, Eastbourne, The	PLS:A	1		1	1	1	1	1		1	1		1	1	1	1
	8.00	International House Torquay	PLS:A	1	1		1	1	1		1	1		1	1	1	1	1
	8.00	INTO Queen's University Belfast	Pathway	1	1	1		1	1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	8.00	Kaplan International Bournemouth	PLS:A	1	1	1		1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
	8.00	†Kings Oxford	PLS:A	1	1	1				1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1
	8.00	St. Clare's, Oxford	PLS:Y BS	1	1	1		1	1		1	1	1		1	1	1	1
	8.00	†University of Salford	Uni	1				1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
	7.89	†Sheffield Hallam University*	Uni		1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	
TOP 15%	7.50	†Belfast Metropolitan College*	FE	1		1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1			
	7.50	Bell Young Learners, St. Albans, NEW	PLS:Y	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1			1		1	1
	7.50	†Brunel University, London*	Uni	1		1		1	1	1		1	1	1	1		1	
	7.50	Exsportise	PLS:Y SS	1	1	1		1			1	1		1	1	1	1	1
	7.50	Harrow School Short Courses	PLS:Y BS	1	1	1	1	1	1			1			1	1	1	1
	7.50	Heathfield Summer School	PLS:Y BS	1	1	1		1		1	1	1			1	1	1	1
	7.50	†Hilderstone College*	FE	1		1			1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	
	7.50	Kaplan International Manchester	PLS:A	1	1	1			1		1	1	1	1	1	1		1
	7.50	Kensington Academy of English, NEW	PLS:A	1	1	1		1	1		1	1	1		1		1	1
	7.50	Kings Brighton	PLS:A	1				1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1
	7.50	†South and City College, Birmingham	FE	1	1			1	1	1	1		1	1	1		1	
	7.50	Stafford House School of English, Canterbury	PLS:Y+A	1	1	1		1	1		1	1	1	1			1	
	7.50	Stafford House School of English, London	PLS:A	1	1	1		1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
	7.50	†Perth College*	FE	1	1	1	-1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			
	7.50	†University of Birmingham	Uni	1	1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			
	7.50	†University of Nottingham	Uni	1				1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	
	7.37	Teesside University	Uni	1				1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	
	7.37	†University of Chichester	Uni	1					1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	
	7.37	University of Dundee*	Uni		1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1		1		1	
	7.37	University of Leicester	Uni		1	1			1		1	1		1	1	1	1	
TOP 20%	7.00	Bede's Summer School, Hailsham	PLS:Y BS	1	1	1		1		1	1				1	1	1	1
	7.00	†Cardiff and Vale College*	FE	1	1				1	1		1	1	1	1		1	
	7.00	EC Manchester	PLS:A	1	1			1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1		
	7.00	ECS*	PLS:Y SS	1		1		1	1		1		1	1	1	1		1
	7.00	EF International, Brighton*	PLS:A	1	1	1	-1	1	1		1	1	1		1		1	1
	7.00	EF International, Manchester*	PLS:A	1	1	1		1	1		1	1	1		1		1	
	7.00	Kaplan International, Oxford	PLS:A	1	1	1		1	1		1	1	1		1		1	

Percentile	Score	Institution	Type	Strategic and quality management	Staff management	Student administration	Publicity	Premises and facilities	Learning resources	Academic staff profile	Academic management	Course design	Learner management	Teaching	Care of students	Accommodation	Leisure opportunities	safeguarding under 18s
TOP 20% cont.	7.00	Kings Summer Camps	PLS:Y BS	1		1	1	1	1			1			1	1	1	1
	7.00	Language in Action, Multicentre	PLS:Y SS	1	1	1		1	1			1			1	1	1	1
	7.00	NCG, Liverpool	PLS:A	1	1	1		1	1		1	1	1		1		1	
	7.00	New College, Durham	FE	1		1		1	1			1	1	1	1	1	1	
	7.00	Sherborne International*	PLS:Y BS	1		1		1	1			1	1		1	1	1	1
	7.00	Sidmouth International School*	PLS:Y+A	1	1		1	1			1	1			1	1	1	1
	7.00	Studio Cambridge	PLS:A	1	1				1	1	1		1		1	1	1	1
	6.84	De Montfort University*	Uni	1		1		1	1			1		1	1	1	1	
	6.84	ECS Scotland*	PLS:A	1	1		1	1	1					1	1	1	1	
	6.84	Kent School of English, NEW	PLSY+A	1		1			1		1	1		1		1	1	1
	6.84	Nottingham Trent University*	Uni	1				1	1			1	1	1	1	1	1	
TOP 25%	6.50	Bucksmore Education*	PLS:Y SS	1	1	1	1		1		1	1	1				1	
	6.50	Celtic English Academy	PLS:A	1	1	1	1				1		1		1	1	1	
	6.50	Churchill House School of English Language	PLS:Y+A	1		1			1	1	1	1	1			1	1	
	6.50	EF International, Eastbourne*	PLS:A	1	1	1	-1	1	1		1	1	1		1		1	
	6.50	IH London Young Learner Centres	PLS:Y	1	1	1		1	1			1			1		1	1
	6.50	Itchen Sixth Form College*	FE	1	1	1		1				1	1		1	1	1	
	6.50	Manor Courses*	PLS:Y SS	1	1	1	-1	1			1	1			1	1	1	1
	6.50	Millfield English Language Holiday Courses	PLS:Y BS	1	1	1		1	1						1	1	1	1
	6.50	NCG, Manchester	PLS:A	1	1	1		1					1	1	1		1	1
	6.50	Severnvale Academy, NEW	PLS:A	1	1	1		1		1					1	1		1
	6.50	Sheffield College*	FE		1			1	1			1	1	1	1	1		1
	6.50	St. Brelade's College*	PLS:A	1	1	1		1	1	1	1					1	1	
	6.50	English Experience (UK) Ltd., The	PLS:Y		1	1			1		1	1	1	1			1	1
	6.50	†University of Bradford	Uni	1				1	1	1	1	1		1	1			
	6.32	University of Greenwich	Uni		1			1	1			1	1	1	1		1	

KEY

1 = strength
 -1 = need for improvement
 NA = not applicable
 Blank = met the standard
 † = high quality teaching
 * = compliance report

Biz

BS

FE

TT

PLS:A

PLS:Y+A

PLS:Y BS

PLS:Y SS

Uni

PWay

Business and professional training centre

Boarding school

Further education college

Teacher training specialist

Private language school primarily accepting adults 16+

Private language school catering for both adults and young learners

Private language boarding school primarily catering for young learners under 16

Private language summer school primarily catering for young learners under 16

University

Pathway

The information in this table is based on the latest Summary Statements for each centre as of 13 September 2024 and any compliance report where applicable. The Summary Statement can be found on page 1 of the full report for every accredited centre. These can be found at britishcouncil.org/education/accreditation/centres.

But what does it all mean?

We take a closer look at what has changed and what it means for the Gazette Centres of Excellence.

The most noticeable change about the 2024 rankings is how much shorter the list is this year.

Since the end of COVID lockdowns, despite the disappearance of 25% of accredited centres—and up to 30% for private language schools—the rankings pages ran to at least three and half pages.

This year it fits neatly on to three.

There are still around 370 language centres on the British Council lists, counting all the different accredited operations some schools run, not far off from the total we logged last year. But the Centre of Excellence (CoE) numbers have gone down by about 20%.

Why? There are three main reasons:

The first is that, since 2021 to the end of last year, centres were able to opt for a compliance inspection. No new strengths were given and the provider was allowed to carry on citing the areas of strength that were awarded at its last inspection.

Needs Improvement in an area could be given and these were deducted from the score for the purposes of our ranking. A score could go down, but it could not go up.

By opting in to a Compliance Inspection most CoEs could be sure of remaining in our ranking unless they scored too many Needs for Improvement,

By last year it became clear that centres who opted for Full Reports often saw sharp falls in Areas of Strength awarded, while those on Compliance Reports rarely dropped more than two or three points.

An analysis of the figures showed that the weaknesses tended to be associated with management; in particular, academic management. The premises were still nice and accommodation remained okay, but scores for Teaching and Learning were all over the place.

This should perhaps be no surprise. Virtually every Director of Studies (DOS) in the UK, along with all the teachers, was made redundant during the pandemic. Having found their management skills were much sought after in other sectors where they were assured of permanent contracts and better money, very few of them came back.

It takes an experienced DOS with an eye for detail and a thorough knowledge of the accreditation scheme to achieve CoE status, especially when most teachers were new and inexperienced.

The lack of an experienced DOS may be the reason that the number of Needs for Improvement in Teaching and Learning have



increased. Course design, for example, was one of the most common areas of strength in normal times. Now, 12 private language schools have been told they need to improve in that area this year.

Bizarrely, one compliance report for chain schools is reported as having an Area of Strength on the summary statement (issued in a prior inspection) but a Need for Improvement in the area was noted during the compliance inspection.

Not one FE College, University or Pathway programme is reported to have any such need for improvement. After all, all their teachers are graduates, most are qualified to Diploma level, and they are all likely to earn more as teachers than they could get as a language school DOS.

In London, teachers on pathway programmes are on annual salaries of £35,000 to £40,000. Meanwhile, a DOS position in the North of England is on offer at £26,000. In the same city, £26,000 is the starting rate currently on offer for an accounts clerk.

A particular problem with low salary for DOSs is that while there are plenty of expat Brits with the right qualifications and experience wanting to come home, those with a non-British spouse needs a minimum annual salary of £29,000 to get the required visa.

The number of accredited centres has held pretty steady over the last couple of years because new schools have replaced the olds. However, it is largely universities, FE colleges and boarding schools which have left the scheme. These are more likely to score in the top 25% on inspection than the small private language schools, with two or three classrooms and a handful of students which have replaced them.

New centres very rarely hit the *Gazette* rankings; a handful of state sector operation and boarding schools have done so. Small wonder, then, that two of our new entrants were CoEs for many years before dropping down a little. So, welcome back to Severnvale Academy and Plymouth Marjon University.

And most of the other new CoEs are hardly Johnny-come-latelys. Bell St Albans has been around for several years, Bell itself for 90. Kent School of English, best known for its year-round closed courses for school children, was founded in 1972. Kensington Academy, long one of the best value schools in London, dates back to 1976.

The British have long believed that, as with houses and furniture, the older a school is, the better. With private language schools, it certainly seems to hold true in UK EFL.

What about young learners?

A spotlight on summer schools and junior specialists.

There are 21 summer schools and junior specialists in the *EL Gazette* top rankings including, two new entries: Bell St. Albans, which joins its sister multi-centres' operation in our ranking; and our first Welsh Summer school winner, Peartree English Language Experience & Activity (Peartree ELEA) which has teamed up with nearby boarding sixth form, Atlantic World College, part of the 18 strong United World Colleges network, famous as the original pioneers of the International Baccalaureate.

The list of boarding schools has grown a little shorter since COVID but Bede's, Brooke House, Harrow, Heathfield, Millfield, St Clares and Sherborne International stand out. Several boarding schools seem to have left the market, or simply dropped out of the accreditation scheme.

As for the language schools chains, Bell, Kings Education, (which also runs residential sixth form colleges) and Language in Action (owned by Malvern House) make the grade this year. International House London Young

Learners and Bucksmore are in the ranking, but the IH is an affiliation, not a chain, while Bucksmore is owned by NordAnglia, a chain of British Curriculum International schools.

Family-run centres are still going strong; ISCA, our number one pick for non-residential summer course, has been run by the same family for three generations, as has Manor Courses, the number one pick for homestay summer schools. But the list includes ECS and Exsportise, while Centres of Excellence running Young Learners year-round include Broadstairs English Centre, Sidmouth International, and new entrant, Bell St. Albans.

The message for those choosing summer schools remains: stick with the specialists. Summer Boarding Courses still tops the table and Discovery Summer is still riding high. The truth is, as the boarding schools



and the third generation families will tell you, teaching young children and running residential courses for teenagers is something that takes years of experience to perfect.

One reason for the language school-boarding school link up, like that between Partridge and Atlantic College, who together hit the rankings on first inspection, is that it is a good model for language schools breaking into the market to explore.

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Good governance

*Director of Bridge Mills Galway Language Centre, **Patrick Creed**, takes a look at the role of governance in promoting the development of Centres of Excellence.*



Never before in the English Language Education sector has quality and excellence been focussed on so much by so many training organisations; this is an excellent period in the positive development of schools and training organisations.

This can only be a good thing for staff and students alike, but as quality standards increase and more organisations strive for excellence, challenges still exist on how to map that pathway to excellence for organisations.

Schools are busy places with many staff wearing many hats, and trying to find time to learn about how to do things better, and implementing changes to promote excellence, is not always that easy.

A starting point to become a centre of excellence in the work that you do as language training organisation, be it for [British Council](#) accreditation or other, is to look at how your school is structured and the organisational governance that exists, how it works and how it can be improved.

Organisational governance informs the workings of any organisation and with a balanced organisational strategy can help guide quality assurance, quality standards and overall outputs for the organisation, irrespective of size or organisational focus.

What is Good Governance?

Governance outlines a set of guidelines that determine how an organisation is managed. It provides a framework to help oversee the right actions and activities within an organisation, to serve the people and stakeholders in the organisation, and can help to drive quality awareness and quality assurance standards.

Good governance can be driven by the establishment of a Board of Directors whose roles and responsibilities determine the mission and vision of the organisation. The board can also:

- Review and approve strategic planning proposals for the organisation
- Uphold the ethics, values and culture of the organisation
- Identify and evaluate risks and monitor the organisation's risk
- Provide oversight of financial governance and budgetary decision-making
- Have ultimate responsibility for compliance with legal and statutory obligations
- Determine how [knowledge is managed](#) and transferred throughout the organisation

Establishing Subcommittees

The board, of course, cannot carry out all the activities within the organisation, but can action decisions made, and delegate responsibility to committees that report to the board.

If an organisation sets up an Academic Committee, its role can be to protect, maintain

and develop the academic standards of the organisation. In this capacity, the Academic Committee is tasked with ensuring academic decision-making reflects the interests of learners, maintains standards, and is independent of commercial considerations of the organisation.

The Academic Committee has delegated authority from the Board of Directors to carry out its function. These functions and responsibilities of an Academic Committee may include:

- Providing an annual report to the Board of Directors, encompassing all aspects of the Academic Committee's functions and responsibilities.
- Academic Oversight; providing advice and making recommendations to the Board of Directors on academic planning proposals, and advising the Board of Directors on resource requirements.
- Ensuring that systems of academic administration are in place, which are fit for purpose and encompass the entirety of the student experience.
- Maintaining the threshold academic standards of the education awards conferred on the programmes delivered by the organisation.
- Establishing and managing the activities of its subcommittees, including their terms of reference.
- Establishing and managing ad hoc committees as appropriate to deal with specific academic issues, such as academic appeals.

- Delegating responsibility and, where appropriate, decision-making authority to subcommittees.
- Ensuring that learners receive a high-quality academic experience.
- Approving and implementing policies relating to admissions, accreditation of prior learning and entry standards.
- Reviewing the operation and effectiveness of policies for the selection, admission, retention, progression and exclusion of learners.
- Ensuring only programmes approved by the committee and where applicable relevant accreditation bodies may be offered by the organisation
- Assuring and overseeing the quality of published and public information.
- Ensuring validation programme conditions are adhered to and recommendations considered.

Establishing programme boards

An Academic Committee can establish subcommittees as needed, which are involved in carrying out a particular function or role, and report to the Academic Committee.

This may involve any number of different functions that could include a review of the Quality Standards of the organisation, reviewing job descriptions within the organisation, developing handbooks or other necessary documentation for the organisation

or reviewing appraisal processes and any other processes that the organisation implements.

The Academic Committee can also establish a programme board to ensure that any programme run by the organisation is in alignment with approved programme documentation and schedules. It can monitor feedback collected from learners and teachers to support the continuous improvement of the programme, and respond where appropriate.

A programme board may also:

- Monitor the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment methods and adjust where appropriate.
- Monitor the implementation of quality assurance procedures and associated improvement activities.
- Monitor learner attendance, progression and performance.
- Make recommendations in relation to library resources as needed to better support programme delivery
- Review reports from External Examiners, external accreditation bodies where applicable.
- Provide an annual report to the Academic Committee, including data and information pertaining to teaching, learning and assessment, the learning environment, and learning resources and curriculum .

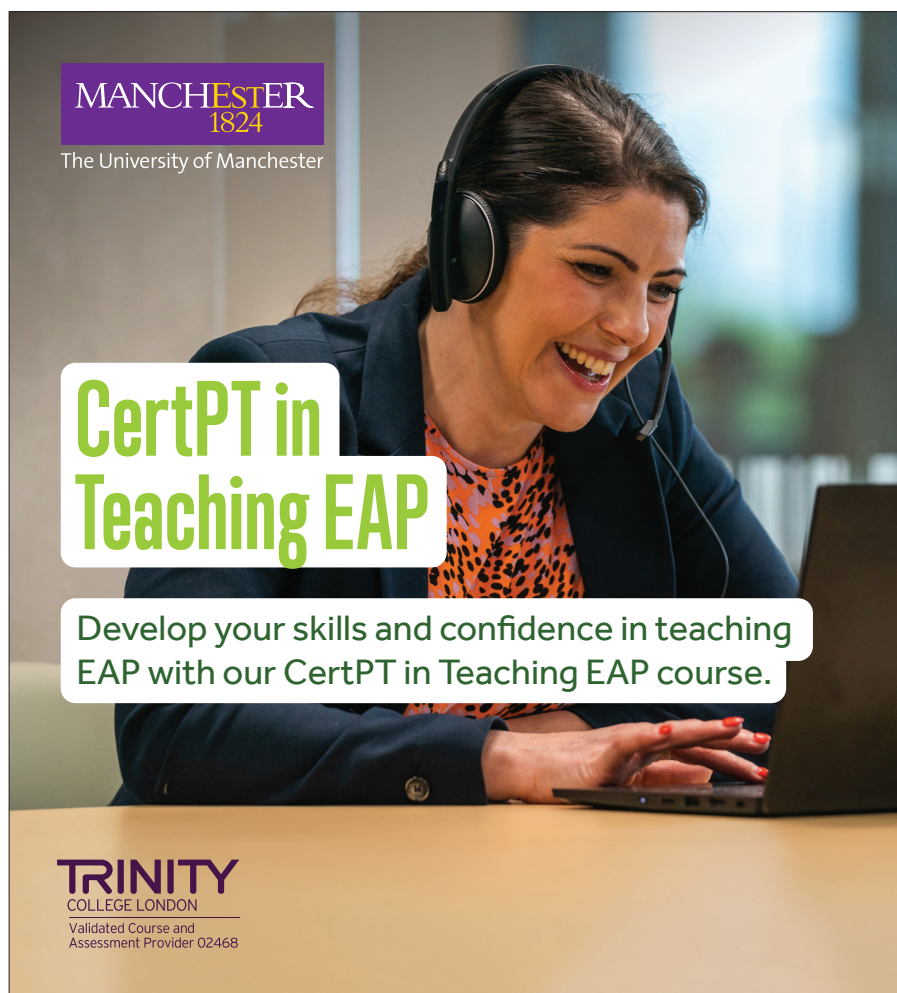
Whether you are a large or small training organisation, and wherever you are on your Quality Development journey, having a structured approach to the development of your organisation as a Centre of Excellence, is the best first step.

A Management Board with a focus on the strategic development of your organisation is a good starting point. The Board, through the empowerment of an Academic Committee, Subcommittees and Programme Boards as appropriate, can explore how the organisation runs, review feedback from all stakeholders and then recommend ways in which improvements can be made to drive change.

All this will help deliver the Centre of Excellence you want your organisation to be, with tangible benefits for everyone involved in the organisation.



Patrick Creed has held roles as Teacher, Teacher Trainer, ADoS, DoS and now School Owner and Director. He co-wrote the *Clockwise Intermediate Teacher Resource Book* published by OUP and completed his Delta qualification in 2016. He holds a Masters in Ergonomics and Physics, a Masters in Renewable Energies and a Masters in Project and Programme Management.



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The future of English assessment

Francesca Woodward reveals five key things about the future of English assessment.

When Andreas Schleicher from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recently described working with our experts in Cambridge as a 'perfect partnership' he couldn't have put it better.

He made the comments on an episode of [Teachers Talk Tech Podcast](#) which looked at the PISA Foreign Language Assessment (FLA), and other significant milestones on the horizon for English assessment.

I recently teamed up with Andreas to discuss the future of assessment. Andreas leads the Directorate of Education and Skills at OECD. We've been working together since 2018 on the FLA, a large-scale survey which will show how English is taught and learnt in schools across the world.

Here's five things we discussed:

1. The PISA FLA is coming!

What should countries focus on when teaching English? Should it be teacher training? Curriculum development? Or encouraging students to start learning as early as possible?

These are big questions for the future of English assessment, and many of the answers will come to light in the upcoming PISA FLA. [Cambridge's role in the PISA FLA](#) includes providing test content, undertaking the scoring of speaking, advising on survey design, platform development, test administration, and reporting against CEFR levels. The PISA FLA will give the world a unique look into what makes effective English language teaching and learning.

2. Learning and assessment will become more integrated

We also discussed the importance of integrating learning and assessment and the opportunities to do that even more effectively in the future. Teachers use assessment tools every day to make judgments about what learners can do and to inform next steps. This is an approach that's known to be highly effective, and technology helps us to support teachers even further in this area.

I predict that future assessments might not be taken in annual cycles, but at the right time for learners. Of course, there will continue to be a role for summative assessment, because being able to prove your skills in line with internationally recognised standards will remain essential. However, the data you gather as you learn and the formative assessments you take along the way will help build a fuller picture of a learners' skills.

3. AI is here, but we still need humans!

AI assisted technologies will continue to become commonplace in education because



they can create fast personalised learning experiences with content and practice materials tailored to the individual. However, it's essential that the teacher is involved throughout the learning process, because teaching and learning are all about people, and AI can't replace the social and emotional aspect of learning.

I would encourage teachers to experiment with AI tools and incorporate them into their classrooms in a way that helps students to critically evaluate AI generated content. Our goal is to increase access to quality education through digital tools, while also maintaining the standards of pedagogical quality that we are renowned for. So, we're supporting teachers to help them embrace the change, learn from each other, and help them get the best out of this technology.

4. The role of assessment organisations will change

Assessment organisations will need to adapt rapidly to the changing landscape of education. This will mean more collaboration with tech partners and governments to develop new assessment models that are more personalised, flexible and adaptable. In the age of AI tutors and personalised learning, our role is increasingly to ensure integrity, reliability, fairness and validity. It will also be important to make sure that assessments reflect the evolving needs of society.

5. Measuring impact is key

One area that will become more important than ever is measuring educational impact. We've always strived to measure and report on our impact, using a model called 'impact by design'. This means that whenever we

develop a new product, we begin to think about the intended impact we want it to have on its users and wider society.

As a foundation for this work, we've developed an [impact framework](#) against which to measure the outcomes of our learning and assessment products. And then when products are out in the market, we need to know whether they are performing as expected and delivering the positive impacts intended for our learners, bearing in mind relevant contextual and socio-cultural aspects.

It's an exciting time to be involved in English language learning and assessment, but we'll need data to help us all stay ahead. That's just one of the many reasons we're delighted to be working with Andreas and the team at OECD on the PISA FLA, because it will give us a glimpse into the future and provide this essential data for English language learning and teaching".

What is PISA?

PISA, the world's largest comparison of educational outcomes, is carried out every four years. For the first time, the 2025 survey will include an assessment of English, using tests developed through a unique OECD-Cambridge partnership. The PISA Foreign Language Assessment (FLA), a large-scale survey which will show how English is taught and learnt in schools across the world.

Francesca Woodward is Global Managing Director for English at Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

Mastering the art of professional development

Fabio Cerpelloni sits down with NILE's Martyn Clarke to discuss the school's MA in Professional Development for Language Education and what students can expect to achieve.



Q: Can you provide an overview of the MA programme at NILE and its main objectives?

The MA program is validated by the University of Chichester. We work with educators from all over the world who have busy professional lives. So we've made our program as flexible as possible. It's modular, and it's about trying to offer people as much personal choice in how they study, what they study, and the frequency with which they're able to engage in studying.

The program has been going on for almost 30 years and we normally have around 200 students within it. Students have a six-year period to finish their studies, but of course, many complete it before this overall deadline.

This is key because it gives people a lot of opportunities to adapt their study programme as their circumstances change: students might get promoted, they might move to different places or get involved in projects they didn't anticipate when they joined.

We work on a personal basis and actively support the students in taking what they need and when they need it.

Q: Which modules are the most popular and, in your opinion, why?

Our three most popular modules are Materials Development, Trainer Development, and Management in Language Education.

The reason for this is pretty straightforward: educators may specialize in many areas, but the development of materials, if they're classroom-focused, is key to so many different other areas.

Also, we're increasingly seeing teachers creating their own materials with a huge variety of resources available today. 'What makes good material development for my particular context?' This is something more teachers seek to understand.

As for the Trainer Development module, I think it's popular because we have a high calibre of student profiles. Many are sponsored by organizations or their own companies; these are people who are on the move and are more likely to be in a position of coordination.

But I also think a lot of people move into training through natural development. They don't look at it in a formal way, so they come

on our course to gain a more structured understanding of training principles and approaches.

The same with management. If you're in management, you're in teaching development. So there's a symbiosis between the two modules.

Q: What career paths do NILE graduates typically pursue?

In general, our graduates go into or continue in areas of training. They work more closely in supporting others in their area. Some get into consultancy and take on consultancy work or project work. A master's is a gateway into that.

We also see people working in international organizations. For example, one of the things I love about going to IATEFL is that I get to attend conferences, workshops, and presentations by our alumni.

Our tutors are leaders in their field, but also the quality of our students is very high. A lot of them come through the management program and go into teacher coordination, course coordination, school management, and academic management.

Q: How has NILE integrated technology into its MA programmes?

Even when NILE first started, the program had a technologically mediated element to it. We've always been at the forefront of this, and have invested heavily in a bespoke VLE (Virtual Learning Environment). Our focus is on supporting both synchronous and asynchronous environments with learning technologies.

We've developed a range of functions, including video, live sessions, discussion forums, Padlets, and Google tools. This has positioned us well, especially during the lockdown when we supported other institutions in moving their learning online. NILE founded AQUEDUTO too, which supports and accredits online teacher education.

Q: Working at NILE, what is the single best practice you have found for incorporating technology into language education?

The single best practice for incorporating technology is not a technological aspect. It's maintaining the primacy of supportive colleague interaction.

Our technology solutions work because we have a dedicated team supporting tutors and students in their interactions with the technology. We have robust systems and useful technological functions, but the quality of our online team and the support they provide are crucial.

Competence in technology should not define the level of engagement in our courses.

Q: You acted as a project manager for NILE on the British Council Partnered Remote Language Improvement project (PRELIM) in which UK Language Institutions worked in partnership with English Teaching Associations all over the world to support classroom practice. What worked well and what impact has the programme had?

The most important thing in PRELIM is the 'P'. It's not 'we are giving you stuff'. It's not that old top-down form of support. PRELIM is more like 'you're professionals, we're professionals, and we're going to work together'.

The project has worked well because the two partners, the teacher association and the institution in the UK, get together and say, 'Right, how are we going to make this happen? What is it we need to achieve? What would be most helpful for your teachers?'

This is much better than coming in with a premade solution to a problem that you hoped existed, which I don't think works.

The learning during the project was often quite substantial. For example, the first two years were about teacher development. In an online, partnered, remote, program this would traditionally be delivered through Zoom, Teams, PowerPoints, etc.

However, in many contexts, this approach doesn't work because teachers don't have that online accessibility. So one of the big learning points for several schools and institutions in the UK was how to run an online development course on WhatsApp or Telegram.

Also, some institutions in the UK have had a shift in business plans. Before it was about the classic model: overseas students coming into the country to learn English. But some schools have now shifted. They've become more agile and are bidding for programmes overseas, whether it's training, materials development, or consultancy.



Martyn Clarke is the Programme Leader of the MA in Professional Development for Language Education at Norwich Institute for Language Education (NILE). He has been an ELT professional for 30 years and in more than fifteen countries in UK, Europe, Central America and Africa as a consultant teacher trainer and management advisor.



Fabio Cerpelloni is a writing teacher, freelance writer, blogger, ghostwriter, author, English language tutor, YouTuber and podcaster.

You can learn more about him and his work at www.fabiocerpelloni.com.

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Sarah Mercer and Herbert Puchta's 101 Psychological Tips
Cambridge Handbook for Language Teachers
Cambridge University Press, 2023
ISBN: 978-1-00-934370-1

This title is number fourteen in the growing series of easy-to-read pocket editions from CUP, all written by ELT heavyweights such as Alan Maley, Penny Ur and Jeremy Harmer.

Sarah Mercer and Herbert Puchta also require little introduction; each are widely-published in both ELT and the psychology of learning. They have joined forces here to draw on current research and theory of psychology to provide practical tips to enable small changes in approach that should lead to positive outcomes both within and beyond the language classroom.

The tips revolve around three areas of influence: the language teacher's own personal psychology, that of their learners, and that of their group as a whole. In order to be included, the authors applied two key criteria to each tip: they had to be relatively small and quickly applied, and there had to be concrete evidence in the research to indicate previous beneficial outcomes of each.

As with all others in the series, this title is relatively short; each of the tips is covered concisely on a single page and a few references are provided for the interested reader to pursue. The authors state that the tips may be read in any order, but recommend covering Section A first; without the teacher's head being in a healthy place, much less learning is likely to occur.

The book is organised around a core of six areas of the psychology of language learning and teaching.

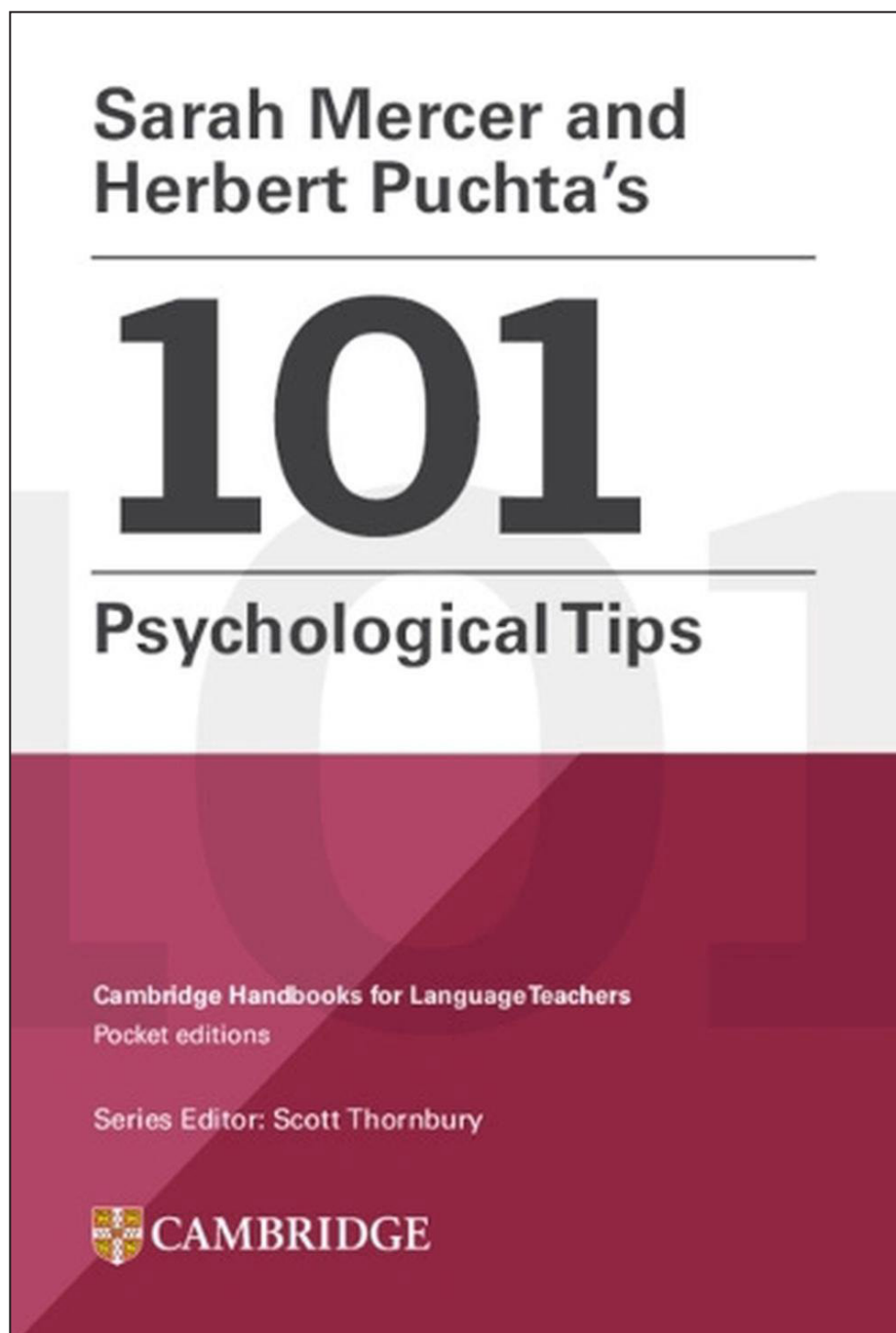
Section A presents 21 tips for the development of teacher wellbeing, an area the authors feel is 'a crucial but often overlooked component of good practice' (pages ix to x) as the teacher's emotional state tends to impact on the whole classroom dynamic.

Tips here include focusing on strengths, being a good colleague, planning one's own professional development and recognising the signs of burnout. The section ends with the suggestion to compile a personal wellbeing checklist based on the tips found most useful thus far; for example, do a random act of kindness once a week.

Section B focuses on ways the teacher can lead a group of learners with compassion, authority and skill.

As it covers classroom management techniques and interpersonal skills, it would be of particular benefit to teachers new to the profession. Tip 25 is one to keep in mind at all times; this is devoted to 'micromessages', or the verbal or non-verbal acts of communication the teacher engages in, such as a single word or gesture that may affect the socio-emotional climate of the group.

The importance of positive micromessages cannot be overstated.



Section C deals with the socio-emotional climate within the classroom in greater depth, along with the diversity of group dynamics.

Tip 47 concerns regularly taking the temperature of the group by asking learners to respond anonymously to questions such as 'How comfortable do you feel in the group?' and 'Which aspect of classroom life would you like to change?'

The remaining three sections focus solely on the learner. Section D introduces fourteen tips to encourage learner engagement, such as introducing tasks that require prediction, regularly using stories, extending the wait time for learners to respond to questions, and using cold-calling with care—i.e. encouraging the less boisterous to answer.

Tips for improving learner self-esteem in Section E include using peer feedback, and getting learners to embrace mistakes. For school teachers, one other that appealed to

me was contacting parents or caregivers with good news and praise about the children they deal with.

The psychological tips in the final section on empowering learners includes two that can never be overestimated: encouraging students to keep a portfolio so they can reflect and detect progress, and—when possible—embracing all learners' languages by introducing translanguaging.



Wayne Trotman is a teacher educator at İzmir Katip Çelebi University, İzmir, Turkey.