

Understanding the International standards for the TESOL industry and employment pathways

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Introduction

There is a default “internationally reputable entry level standard for a TESOL certificate”. This is a criteria that is set by Accreditation UK the official British English Language Centre monitoring body. The British Council is the main agency backing the Accreditation UK agency. Other government backed agencies, such as NEAS, in Australia and TESL Canada almost exactly, duplicate this criteria.

So any qualification provider wishing to claim “credible” recognition in English Speaking countries would need to meet this criterion. Teach International’s Certificate IV in TESOL does. The term “credible” is loaded however, as in many non English speaking countries credibility is often decided on less specific criteria – read on...

Realistically, the bulk of schools in non English speaking countries are more generally after “any TESOL certificate” and will be very interested in any certificate that is built on the internationally preferred “Communicative methodology”. This is where our iTESOL, Certificate in TESOL and Certificate III in TESOL fit in, with the distinguishing features in the case of Certificate III of including a practice teaching component and the Australian government logo.

Practice teaching often counts a lot in non English speaking countries, but may not be an issue. However, it is essential to meet the criteria, which includes practice teaching, in English speaking countries. Practice teaching is where training includes teaching real ESOL students and where that process is formally assessed. Having this process embedded in a TESOL training programme increases the certainty that teachers know what to do in the classroom versus theory only.

Because there are many certificates on offer non English speaking counties like to see government logos on certificates, meaning that there must be a government auditing body overseeing delivery. Likewise University accreditation can count in providing certainty to potential employers.

This document also provides information on how employment and career opportunities open up in relation to various courses of study.

The “internationally reputable entry level standard for a TESOL certificate” is represented by Accreditation UK, run by the British Council and English UK. Accreditation UK is the quality assurance scheme for the UK ELT sector (<http://www.britishcouncil.org/accreditation>). The Accreditation UK criteria for a TEFL initial entry qualification is that the course must:

- be **externally validated** by a reputable examination body (usually a university or a recognised examinations board).
- contain **at least six hours supervised teaching practice** (i.e. practice where a qualified assessor observes the trainee teacher teaching real TEFL students and gives feedback to the trainee on his/her performance).
- Contain **at least 100 hours of TEFL input**.

How is the “established reputable standard” applied internationally in English Speaking countries? Let’s have a look at Australia.

NEAS is Australia's national accreditation scheme for English Language Teaching centres. If you look on their website <http://www.neasaustralia.com/fst.html> and select the “Teachers>ELT Centre” link you will find an almost word for word definition in line with the Accreditation UK criteria. Accreditation UK and NEAS are government backed, so the criteria becomes the minimal TESOL certification standard for English Language Teaching centres in

Australia. The same system works in the UK.

Not all countries set the criteria so comprehensively, but the criteria becomes “the norm” as reputable and established schools request the standard with industry self regulating bodies supporting it. For example, TESL Canada is an industry self regulating body – they notch up the requirement of the practice teaching hours from 6 to 10 hours (for courses other than CELTA/Trinity), but through a process of applying for Recognition of Prior Learning, you can see that the approximate criteria gains a TESOL Canada “Professional Certificate Level One”, being the level designated for employment in the Canadian English language centre industry.

In New Zealand the accreditation body of English Language Schools is the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). In this case each school sets out its TESOL qualifications standards and NZQA endorses that. Usually schools will include something akin to the Accreditation UK standard, as well as a range of other options.

Accreditation (actually, registration and course accreditation) means the course structure and delivery structure has been analyzed by a government supported accreditation body and this likely involves a form of auditing of the academic environment on an ongoing basis. It is a quality measurement, but also means there is government approval.

Can I get a job in an English speaking country with a certificate qualification that meets the criteria if I don't have a degree?

You will need a degree, unless there is some leeway in terms of the employment requirements of English Language centres. For example in New Zealand where schools design their own employment criteria which is then sanctioned by NZQA, they often allow a 10 or 20% buffer to employ people without degrees if they have substantial experience. NEAS in Australia used to allow this buffer, but they took this out of their criteria in 1011. Generally this buffer is there to allow for Employer discretion at times when industry growth makes it difficult to find enough qualified teachers. The general principal is that you need a degree of some kind to work in English Language centres in English speaking countries.

What they are expecting with a degree is that one's writing and grammatical knowledge is standardized according to common English usage – that means, up to a professional workplace level.

Mostly our graduates look for work in countries where English is not an official language. In Australia our Cert IV in TESOL meets the NEAS criteria, so you can work here with English Language centres with that as long as you also have a degree (of any kind).

Do certificate qualifications transfer equally in English speaking countries?

Generally to get work in a country where English is the common and official language you will do your training in that country. If you are Australia you can legally work in Australia and if you do your training in Australia providers will have designed qualifications to meet the in-country criteria. Since there will be teachers heading overseas after being trained and returning language schools in countries where English is the common and official language have the luxury and mainly being able to pick qualified and experienced teachers. Though when the market is up newly graduated teachers in the same country can usually find work.

It then gets more difficult to find work in English speaking countries if you gained your qualification from another country. You will need to be there in person for interviews and perhaps offer or be asked to do demonstration lessons.

Also, there are often variations on employment criteria. For example, if you gained your qualification in Australia and wanted to work in Canada, you will need to have had 10 hours of practice teaching required. TESOL Canada <http://www.tesl.ca/> is the equivalent to NEAS as an overriding industry organisation. In Canada you would need to apply to TESOL Canada through their Certificate Application process and at entry level get a "Professional Certificate Standard One". Then you can legally work in Canada as long as you have a university

degree. This process of getting a "Professional Certificate Standard One" is their way to verify overseas qualifications at industry level.

In the UK it is difficult to find long term work if your qualification is gained from overseas. If you have an EU passport or have a work visa according to inter country visa agreements you can find work in the UK, particularly through summer school work, where there is high demand for new graduate teachers.

For long term employment in the UK in English Language centres it is more difficult because most, though not all, language schools in the UK have signed up to be accredited by the British Council Accreditation Scheme. As such, those schools must employ people that meet the Accreditation UK criteria. However, in fact the in this process the auditors seem to interpret that criteria outside of scope to make it meet the British Council criteria - effectively being protectionist of the teacher training programmes run by the British Council. The British Council auditors interpretation of the Accreditation UK criteria can be as follow (see red font):

- be **externally validated** by a reputable examination body (**usually** a university or a recognised examinations board).
- contain **at least six hours supervised teaching practice** (i.e. practice where a qualified assessor observes the trainee teacher teaching real TEFL students and gives feedback to the trainee on his/her performance).
- Contain **at least 100 face-to-face hours of TEFL input**.

In terms of working in Native English speaking countries the main principle stands: gaining qualifications in your own country will enable you to gain employment in that country as long as you also have a degree. From that starting position you should look to countries where English is not the common language and if you return to your own country you can find employment, in a career sense, in your own country. There are exceptions to this general principle, but you will need to work your way through those issues.

I have seen on the Internet organizations claiming to be international standardization bodies for TESOL qualifications. Are they?

There is no international standardization body for the TESOL industry. If you come across organizations claiming international standardization licensing of TESOL qualifications you should be skeptical.

Accreditation is often explained by providers as a verification of the quality of their training. This is only partly true. An accreditation process means the course structure has been analyzed by industry experts at some stage, but quality of training is achieved by far more than that.

So far, it has been explained how the Accreditation UK standard dominates the International standards as a bar that qualifications are compared to. There simply isn't any international accreditation body, which does this.

One should also not expect that the words "certificate", "diploma" or "advanced diploma" to necessarily reflect what you think of as the level of those qualifications. The key factor is to look at the course content and compare that to the Accreditation UK criteria. Sometimes organisations are creative with their use of the words "certificate", "diploma" or "advanced diploma".

What is the best strategy for gaining a qualification for English Language centres?

In terms of deciding what qualification to do the answer then is to get a certificate that meets the Accreditation UK criteria if you want your employment options to be maximized. Using that aim for employment with reputable and established schools overseas and after a year, you will have the option of working in English speaking countries as long as you meet other requirements such as a degree.

If you are thinking in the first instance to keep your budget down and your first intention is to work in a non English speaking country, you can obtain a certificate below the Accreditation UK delivery criteria – as long as it represents “Communicative Methodology”.

What about working for a TAFE/Polytechnic or university ESL department or centre?

So far we have been considering the private English Language Industry. There are two other main areas in the industry. These are TAFE/Polytechnics which offer courses predominantly to migrants and English language centres within universities. These other types of programmes often pathway students into their own vocational programmes.

In these cases TAFE/Polytechnic or university ESL departments have their own preferences for qualifications and these are usually, but not always in addition to a TESOL Certificate.

For example, in Australia NEAS has a variation for AMEP teachers (Adult Migrant English Program). These types of courses are mostly run by TAFEs in Australia. To work in an AMEP programme teachers additionally need something called a Certificate in Training and Assessment and they will accept educational or teaching degrees with TESOL methodology instead of a TESOL certificate or a post graduate Certificate. This shows the need for a more extensive academic expertise.

Universities usually prefer or require post graduate qualifications in TESOL or applied linguistics. Depending on the state of the market and the prestige or contract conditions they may be requiring post graduate Certificate, Diploma or Masters TESOL qualifications and experience.

What is the best strategy for gaining a qualification for working in TAFE/Polytechnics and Universities?

In terms of deciding about these other and higher level qualification a suggested strategy is to start with a certificate that meets the Accreditation UK delivery criteria, teach overseas to gain the experience which TAFEs/Polytechnics and Universities naturally prefer and then enrol by distance from overseas in a suitable other or higher qualification. These distance learning options are very common. If you have not completed the qualification overseas, do so when you return.

Or, in times of growth?

During periods of industry growth you may be able to pathway into TAFEs/Polytechnics and Universities by gaining experience in the local English Language Centre industry. You could do this by gaining a certificate that meets the Accreditation UK delivery criteria, and in the first instance gain employment in the local English Language sector. Then as you build your experience, undertake further part time studies as determined by your *next employment goal.

* There are sub categories of employment goals, which also have preferred Qualifications. One common example, is if you should set your sights on being a Director of Studies in an English Language Centre. In that case a common step is to progress to a diploma in English language teaching, which may or may not need to be post graduate depending on the employment sector preference. Once you know your preferred employment pathway you can discuss the pros and cons of the various qualifications available.

Qualification preferences

You will find the principles, as explained so far can be applied pretty much across the international TESOL industry. You will also find preferences for specific qualifications. One often requested qualification is the CELTA. This is a UK TESOL qualification delivered by licensees in various countries. The CELTA is discussed more below. In some cases schools may have an affiliation agreement with a training provider, which dictates that they employ only teachers with certain qualifications. If a school runs their own teacher training programme, you will possibly find a preference or requirement that they employ those with their qualification that they deliver. There is a proliferation of qualifications on the market – and the employment market is huge! While, as with any industry there will be niche segments and historical preferences such as for The CELTA, there are many many options for various qualifications within the International TESOL industry.

There has been a lot of examples related to Australia – what about New Zealand and elsewhere.

A number of references above have been made to the Australian environment. Let's look at the New Zealand environment since it is second largest region where Teach International delivers its courses.

In New Zealand the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) as with the Australian Qualification Framework (AQTF) registers Training Organisations. In Australia not all providers need to be registered with AQTF, but in New Zealand it is mandatory for all providers running courses with educational outcomes.

NZQA and AQTF have counterparts in other countries: In the UK it is QCA, in Wales it is ACCAC, in Scotland it is SQA, In Canada there are provincial governing bodies such as the PCTIA. These government bodies set up educational standardisation frameworks, devise packaged training curricular, and register and audit educational organisations. They are national bodies that cover all sectors of education, though often not universities.

All English Language schools in New Zealand are required to be registered through NZQA. When they register each school determines their employment qualification criteria. This will generally be in line with the Accreditation UK standard with options for lesser qualifications to deal with market flexibility.

The use of the phraseology "Certificate IV " is less known in New Zealand because it is an AQTF term representative of a standard level. So, when seeking employment in New Zealand, as with Australia it may be important when explaining your Teach International qualification to explain it as meeting the British Council delivery criteria as well as the Australian NEAS criteria. If you have a Certificate IV in TESOL from Teach International, this along with the course content is explained on the back of the certificate.

There is an organisation in New Zealand called English New Zealand. They have a number of member language schools and generally require them to employ teachers with certificates that meet the Accreditation Uk criteria.

Equivalency of Teach International's qualifications to CELTA

We cannot say any certificate is equal to any other. Because people have often heard of the CELTA course and ask us for comparisons to our Certificate IV in TESOL. The correct way to understand this is to refer to the Accreditation UK delivery criteria as I have done in this documentation.

What is CELTA? The Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) and its delivery equivalent the Trinity Certificate in TESOL are TESOL entry qualifications that are issued from UK, and are often delivered by licensed providers in other countries.

As a course, CELTA is accredited by the UK National Qualifications Framework: QCA in England, ACCAC in Wales and CCEA in Northern Ireland as a Level 4 qualification. It can also be understood that at the government accreditation level there are national qualification frameworks in place in countries where English is the commonly spoken language. Level 4 of the UK National Qualifications Framework is the same as Level 4 on the Australian Qualification Framework.

As with Teach International's Certificate IV in TESOL which meets the AQTF level 4, the CELTA meets the equivalent level delivery criteria with QCA.

Naturally, these qualifications and any others that meet the Accreditation or equivalent level criteria may well exceed these criteria and have distinguishing features. So, it is still wrong to make a comparison only to ask if it meets defined certificate level criteria as explained above.

What if I am semi-retired or retired?

There are no limitations on age for gaining a TESOL qualification, but sometimes people ask us about whether a mature aged person is restricted in the TESOL field for employment options.

The TESOL world is open to mature teachers, perhaps more than any other industry. Mature trainees need to appreciate that there are some ageist limitations, but that these can be overcome. In a few countries there can be visa limitations beyond 55 – presently known to exist in England, Thailand and Brunei. Otherwise the age limit will be 60, 65 or non-existent. That is, according to government visa regulations only. China has recently begun enforcing a retirement policy of 60 for men and 55 for women.

You should expect to widen your employment search to regional areas and not rely on the established schools in the big cities for employment.

The established schools in the big cities are generally operating in a highly competitive environment and as such will hunt more and be more resourced to employ larger numbers of teachers to meet their top priority "image". This image is a youthful and professional image. This varies with younger teachers for young children and mature teachers for adult and business focussed classes. You can see this by looking at the pictures of teachers on the websites – where the schools are presenting their top priority image.

The reality is that there is a complete range of teachers of all ages and educational backgrounds at schools, but that in the main cities, due to the competitive environment, it will be more difficult for mature teachers to gain employment. Therefore, a mature teacher simply needs to look more regionally. By this, we mean stepping back from the central suburbs where the most competitive employment practices go on and stepping out of the bigger cities to regional cities and towns.

The native versus non native English speaking teacher

Another area to explain is the issue of being a native or non native English speaker. Because the preferred methodology, termed “communicative methodology” emphasizes the purpose to teach students to “use” English, rather than passive learning, there is a natural preference for native English speaking teachers because they will have the theoretically widest spectrum of knowledge of English in use. It is a key employment criterion.

Employment criteria in English speaking countries also often includes, but not exclusively, the requirement of being a native English speaker. What they are expecting with native English teachers is someone who can model the language as it is really used - being the knowledge and ability of what to say and generate in various situations. There is also intrinsic cultural experience needed to do this.

However, If you meet the entry criteria for TESOL Certificate courses, a non native speaker may gain a TESOL qualification. If you are in this category, you need to understand the following generally understood definition of a Native English speaker:

“For the purposes of English language teaching, a native English speaker is someone who was educated in an English speaking education system from childhood and is presently competent with standard English usage. Additionally, English was the first language in the home environment and/or English was the commonly spoken language in the country of upbringing”

This definition, as defined by Teach International, and explanations hereby offered, are provided for applicants to understanding how one’s English Speaking ability may affect employment and may be interpreted by employers and colleagues in the TESOL industry.

If you take out one criterion out of the definition, you may be what is termed as “near native” or “bi-lingual”. For example, if you were raised and educated in a country such as India, Malaysia or Singapore. In these situations you may say that you are “bi-cultural” an/or “bi-lingual”, but this is not the same as being a native English speaker.

There are always exceptions to prove the rule. Someone who came to live in an English speaking country such as England, Canada, America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand after their teenage years and have been immersed in the society of the country for an extended period - perhaps five years may well have risen to native English Speaker competency. This does depend on the depth and level of immersion, age and ability to pick up English. If in reality your language level, including pronunciation, matches closely enough to that of a university graduate who was born and educated in English speaking country then for all intents and purposes you will be regarded as a native English Speaker and so should present yourself as such.

In most cases to gain employment in the TESOL industry in countries where English is the commonly spoken language, you will be expected to be a “*native English speaker*”. However, in some cases, such as when employed to teach new immigrants, employers will respect and seek to employ a percentage of “bi-lingual/bi-cultural” teachers because of the cultural and language knowledge they offer.

In countries where English is not the common language, while “*native English speakers*” are highly sought after, there will be a percentage of positions preferably given to “near native” and “bi-lingual” TESOL teachers – particularly for teaching lower level students. However, in these cases the pay may be less.

But, also there are opportunities for “near native” and “bi-lingual” TESOL teachers who have been educated in English from a young age. This reflects the expansion of English as an International language (World Englishes). For example, teachers of Indian or Pakistani ethnic descent find TESOL opportunities in the Middle East. People of European descent also find opportunities in many countries. The explanation for this is due more to the way employers and learners culturally identify and any such preferences will likely be reflected in work visa requirements for various countries.

In government provided education there is often a dominance of positions with preference for those with a “near native” and “bi-lingual” ability and this may also be backed by government policy. The reason for this is based on government’s task to protect employment prospects for its citizens.

Being *educated in an English speaking education system* applies in countries where the government education system is in English, as in India, Malaysia or Singapore, or if you were educated from childhood in a private schooling system that had an English curriculum.

The term “*childhood*” childhood means pre-teenager.

The term “*competent with standard English usage*” means that in an English speaking society you are able to interact with native English speakers, such as to (a) professionally perform common workplace communication tasks (b) communicate over the phone and face to face with agencies, such as banks, travel agencies and real estate agents (c) be able to interact on an equal footing in social conversation.

The term “*English was the first language in the home environment*” means that your family uses English as the main means of communication.

The term “*English was the commonly spoken language in the country of upbringing*” means that from the range of 5 – 16 years of age you lived in an English speaking country like England, Canada, America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

Summary

We have established that while there is no international qualification standardization organization for the International TESOL industry, there is a default reputable criteria that determined by historical precedent the level of certificate qualification that is needed to teach in countries where English is the commonly spoken language. This is based on the Accreditation UK delivery criteria.

The Accreditation UK Delivery criterion is reflected across national organizations that set or monitor initial qualification criteria for the TESOL industry in the respective English speaking countries.

In non English speaking countries, it is different. The majority are looking to employ teachers with “a” TESOL Certificate. They want one that incorporates communicative methodology.

Is there a place for non English speaking teachers? Yes, but they need to understand the areas where they are preferred. Is there a place for mature aged teachers? Yes, more than many other industries, but there are some limitations.

How big is the industry? Huge!

What is the wise approach to gaining a first qualification? From Teach International’s point of view, it is to gain their Certificate IV in TESOL because it meets the Accreditation UK delivery criteria and therefore opens up the maximum employment options across the board. However Teach International acknowledges that in non English speaking countries the majority of providers won’t make this distinction – they just want “a” certificate. So, if on a budget and you are just planning on teaching in non English speaking countries then it is just fine to get a lesser qualification. From Teach International’s point of view, we offer a Foundation and Certificate III level qualification to cover this type of choice. We like to recommend the Cert III because it has a government accreditation logo on the certificate and it also has a practice teaching component.

Gaining a TESOL certificate is about starting in the industry, no matter where you are and so it is good to understand how the various offerings fit into the scheme of things. Beyond that there are further qualifications to add to your quiver depending on your preferred employment pathways. Being in the industry is the best time to work that out.

Yes, it's true the world is your oyster!

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