

Earthquake victims helped by English language schools

More than 50 young victims of last month's devastating Italian earthquake will be able to learn English for free in Britain this summer, thanks to the generosity of English UK members.

Language schools have offered 63 free student places after an appeal from the Italian Embassy in London, which says it is overwhelmed by the response.

Giuseppe Berlendi, Counsellor at the Embassy, says: "British people have been showing great generosity and solidarity towards Italy.

"I am really struggling to find the words... I am really confused by this generosity."

He said the Italian Ambassador wanted to thank all the schools, and would also be writing to the British Council with the names of those who had offered courses. "We want to tell them that we asked English schools in Britain and got so many offers we could not accept any others.

"We want to recognise their generosity – it's always rare and must be encouraged."

Almost 300 people died as a result of the earthquake, which struck the central Italian region of Abruzzo on April 6. It registered 6.3 on the Richter scale and left tens of thousands of people homeless. Many are still living in tents.

Mr Berlendi did not know how many young people would decide to take up the offer of free tuition and lodging. "The girls and boys are at present in tents so maybe they won't want to leave their families... I don't know whether there will be more than 50 candidates," he said.

Although eight of the participating schools have also offered free accommodation, the Embassy has asked Italian families living in the UK to take in students from the Abruzzo region so that they can attend the English courses.

So far, 35 families have agreed to host a student and Mr Berlendi believes that it will be possible to take up around 55 of the free places on offer. Details of the schools and the families offering places have been sent to the authorities in the earthquake zone to make the arrangements.

Tony Millns, Chief Executive of English UK, said: "At this challenging time, it is tremendously encouraging to see how positively English UK members have responded to the appeal to give help to the areas of Italy affected by the recent earthquake.

"We hope that the Italian students who come to the UK have a fantastic experience here and help to build stronger ties for the future between Italy and the UK."

Notes to editors

- English UK is the world's leading language teaching association, with more than 400 accredited centres in membership. It covers university and further education college language departments, international study centres in independent schools, educational trusts and charities, and private sector colleges. English UK is a UK registered charity.
- More than 500,000 students every year choose to learn English in Britain, an estimated 43% of all students who travel abroad to study English. They contribute about £1.5 billion to the UK economy in course fees, accommodation and general spending. Many students go on from English language courses to UK degrees or professional qualifications. There are long-term affinity benefits to Britain as well since many students go on to be opinion-leaders and senior figures in their own countries.
- For more information, please contact Tony Millns (Chief Executive of English UK) on 07976511439.