



UK ELT celebrates 40 years of quality scheme

News release

Sunday 4 September

The 40th anniversary of Accreditation UK, the internationally-renowned inspection scheme for UK ELT, is being marked by the industry this autumn.

This week, around 50 study abroad agents will see the scheme's work for themselves when they join the first English UK fam trips since before the pandemic.

They are also attending a dinner with other industry guests including British Council officials, English UK staff and members involved with the scheme and the fam trips plus Department for International Trade representatives.

The UK's International Education champion, Sir Steve Smith, was speaking at the event, which with the fam trips was funded by the Department for International Trade and IELTS to promote UK ELT post-pandemic.

Sir Steve said: "The UK has unrivalled experience in English language teaching, with over 100 years of designing, developing and evaluating the process of learning English; and developing the first English as a Foreign Language teacher-training courses in the 1960s.

"And the UK remains at the forefront of developing educational resources that help English language learners and teachers to achieve their goals using innovative content, methods or media.

"From summer courses to year-round provision, from young learners to business executives, from general English to English for Specific Purposes, the English language offer from 350-plus English UK members across the UK is underpinned by quality, rigorous inspection and continual improvement achieved by robust external inspection, spot checks and self-declarations, with inspection reports being publicly available.

"The importance of accreditation and quality assurance to the UK ELT offer, and the UK education offer more broadly for that matter, cannot be overstated."

Accreditation UK, which is jointly run by the British Council and English UK, has driven up standards in the UK's ELT sector since taking over from government

inspections, extending the industry's global reputation for quality. It is also widely credited with raising standards of English language teaching in competitor nations.

A great strength of Accreditation UK is that although it is independent, working industry representatives sit on both the accreditation board and the Accreditation Scheme Advisory Committee which scrutinises inspection reports before approval.

Mike Welch Director Global Operations, Teaching, British Council said:
"Accreditation has had an enormous impact and positive effect on the ELT sector. It gives course providers the recognition they deserve for the work they do to put students from all over the world at the centre of their work. Accreditation has progressed from the Recognition Scheme and the Courses Validation Scheme to Accreditation UK which is now an internationally recognised standard; a mark of quality that demonstrates a commitment by providers to listen and respond to the needs of stakeholders and students.

"The Accreditation mark gives an assurance of quality to students who are taking or are planning to take an English language course in the UK and ensures that they benefit from studying in a safe environment.

"Over the years, accreditation has raised standards and driven excellence so students visiting the UK have a great experience, which in turn leads to a strengthening of the ELT sector and ultimately provides benefit to Britain. This anniversary is an occasion to celebrate the enduring impact that accreditation has made over the last forty years, and how it has shaped and improved the sector."

Jodie Gray, English UK's chief executive, said: "We are very proud to celebrate 40 years of Accreditation UK which has supported our industry to drive up standards, achieve excellence and an international reputation which is second to none.

"Student experience is at the heart of our offer. Accreditation UK's focus on academic and management quality, as well as standards of care and safeguarding, means our schools are trusted by parents all over the world and students leave wanting to return.

"Accreditation UK works so well because of its unique structure: it is proudly independent but its work is informed by people who work in the sector and understand what our ELT centres and teachers do every day of the week."

Accreditation UK focuses on English language teaching but has developed to oversee most elements of centres' provision in teaching, management and welfare. Providing a safe environment and safeguarding under-18s are now particularly important elements.

Andrew Hjort, principal of Melton College in York who has been involved with the scheme for over 25 years, said: "Accreditation UK has without question changed the student experience in the UK. The holistic nature of the scheme - not just management, not just teaching, not just welfare, not just premises - has ensured a

sense of confidence in clients, and importantly for the growing junior sector, their parents.

“It’s the most widely recognised logo in the world of ELT accreditation. It has made Accreditation an inevitable question. Clients want to know if you are – or, I guess, why you are not!”

Elizabeth McLaren, Accreditation UK’s manager, said its most important effect had been to professionalise and unify UK ELT to give students a wide choice of high-quality courses in a range of settings. “I’m sure the students I taught as an unqualified and inexperienced teacher at an unaccredited language centre in Europe before I started work with the British Council would have had a much better learning experience had the school been run according to British Council accreditation standards,” she said.

Shoko Doherty, CEO of Celtic English Academy in Cardiff and former ELT student said: “The Accreditation UK handbook and the British Council criteria have been the go-to for our organisation. I love the British Council inspections: it is the opportunity for us to see how good we are and identify where we can improve ourselves by getting lots of constructive feedback from inspectors.

“You speak to many agents around the world and they recognise high standard of the British accreditation scheme. Comparing and discussing with colleagues in Japan it really highlighted how comprehensive the Accreditation UK scheme is and I was quite proud to find out the differences.”

Study abroad agent Tatsu Hoshino of the Rising Star agency and JAOS said: “We believe the ELT accreditation system runs by Accreditation UK is the most comprehensive scheme of this kind in the world. Therefore, education agents can easily gain full confidence to introduce the accredited ELT schools in UK.”

Accreditation UK began in 1982 when the government’s education department stopped inspecting private language schools and the British Council became the recognising body for all UK ELT. The inspection scheme was called the English Language Schools Recognition Scheme, while the Courses Validation Scheme was developed for state sector providers.

William Currie, the chairman of the Association of Recognised English Language Schools (ARELS) said: “The announcement of the Council’s Recognition Scheme is, to my mind, of the greatest significance for the profession and, speaking for the ARELS sector, I congratulate the Council on taking on this important responsibility.”

The schemes merged to become the English in Britain Accreditation Scheme in 1998 and finally Accreditation UK in April 2006.

Changes to the visa regulations in 2009 resulted in increased demand for accreditation with numbers peaking at over 570 in autumn 2014. There are now just over 400 accredited providers, with demand continuing from new applicants.

Notes to editors

1. [Accreditation UK](#) is run jointly by the British Council and English UK.
2. The [agent fam trips](#) will visit London; Cardiff and Bristol; the North of England and UKLC Northern centres.
3. The anniversary dinner, reception and fam trips are being supported by the Department for International Trade and IELTS.
4. For further information please contact Susan Young (susan@englishuk.com) or Beatrice Cole (Beatrice.Cole@britishcouncil.org).

Press Pack

Accreditation UK: the history

1957-1982 The Department for Education and Science inspects UK ELT centres: they were “recognised as efficient”

1982: the British Council became the recognising body for all UK ELT services in the UK. It ran two separate schemes for private and state schools until 1998, the English Language Schools Recognition Scheme and the Courses Validation Scheme

1998: the two schemes merge to create the English in Britain Accreditation Scheme

2006: The scheme is rebranded Accreditation UK and is run in partnership with English UK

2019 Accreditation UK was accrediting nearly 500 language centres, bringing 550k students to the UK and helping to generate £1.4 billion for the UK economy

March 2020: inspections suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic

June 2020: Accreditation UK scheme extended to include online delivery of ELT from British Council accredited language centres

October 2020: first remote inspections (for new applicants seeking first accreditation)

2021: re-inspection schedule resumes

Accreditation UK: facts and figures

570: the highest number of centres in the scheme, in 2014

400+: the current number of accredited providers

11: chief and senior inspectors over the years

152: inspectors over the years

What people say about Accreditation UK

Shoko Doherty, CEO Celtic English Academy, Cardiff and former ELT student

“I have been involved in running Celtic from a very early stage, starting as a receptionist, then student services, marketing manager and now as CEO. Through the entire journey the Accreditation UK handbook and the British Council criteria have been the go-to for our organisation. I love the British Council inspections: it is the opportunity for us to see how good we are and identify where we can improve ourselves by getting lots of constructive feedback from inspectors.

“You speak to many agents around the world and they recognise high standard of the British accreditation scheme. Comparing and discussing with colleagues in Japan it really highlighted how comprehensive the Accreditation UK scheme is and I was quite proud to find out the differences.

“The reason I really like Accreditation UK is that it’s an all-round scheme, covering everything from management to premises to teaching resources to marketing to publicity, activity, accommodation, safeguarding. Not many schemes do that and I think it’s a framework we should be proud of.

“Our industry changes all the time and how we run has to actually change and adapt to new circumstances and situations. The pandemic highlighted that Accreditation UK does listen to providers so inspection ran more effectively.”

Andrew Hjort, Principal of Melton College in York with 25 years experience of working in language teaching quality assurance, primarily connected with Accreditation UK

“Accreditation UK has without question changed the student experience in the UK. Without question. The holistic nature of the scheme - not just management, not just teaching, not just welfare, not just premises - has ensured a sense of confidence in clients, and importantly for the growing junior sector, their parents.

“It’s the most widely recognised logo in the world of ELT accreditation. It has made Accreditation an inevitable question. Clients want to know if you are – or, I guess, why you are not!”

Rhona Hodgart, joint chief inspector, has conducted at least 80 inspections and before that served on ASAC, the Accreditation Scheme Advisory Committee

“The cohort of inspectors, both current and previous, has a great store of experience (and, indeed, wisdom) to bring to the Scheme. Inspectors come from a wide range of ELT sectors, with many years of working and managing in ELT centres. This experience is used to support and enrich the practice of current hard-pressed teachers and managers. Many eminent ELT practitioners are and have been

inspectors and their insights have contributed massively to the work and development of the Scheme.

“Our comprehensive inspection model has definitely influenced many other providers nationally and internationally (who have paid us the compliment of drawing heavily on our model!) and we're proud to have played an active role in the growth of high-quality ELT provision worldwide.

“The desire to support colleagues and enable them to enhance their practice through dialogue and interaction as well as through scrutiny and examination, assessment and reportingAt best it is a critical friend and ally rather than a judge and jury.”

Mike Welch Director Global Operations, Teaching, British Council

“In the mid-1980s, I was working as a teacher in London. When it was announced that the Centre I worked at was due an inspection (from a forerunner of Accreditation UK) I vividly remember how seriously the centre's senior leadership team took the inspectors' visit. At the time I didn't realise that this was a relatively new scheme, and that 35 years later I would be playing a slightly different role in the process, but what I did see very clearly was how important accreditation was to the Centre and consequently the impact it had on its working practices.

“One of the important things Accreditation UK has done is to provide benchmarks in different areas that centres can use as a guide. Seeing centres meet these benchmarks is great but what's even better is reading an inspection report that contains several points of excellence. That shows that the centre has looked at something and really developed it. We've always said that the scheme is about more than simple compliance. It is really about driving excellence within the UK ELT sector.

“Being independent is critical to the scheme's success. Of course we need to listen and respond to what stakeholders are saying but the fact that the scheme is both independent and 'not for profit' means that the integrity of the scheme can be protected. Having to strive to reach high standards may not always be popular but ultimately everyone benefits.”

Tatsu Hoshino, Rising Star and JAOS

“We believe the ELT accreditation system runs by Accreditation UK is the most comprehensive scheme of this kind in the world. Therefore, education agents can easily gain full confidence to introduce the accredited ELT schools in UK.”

Gustavo Viale, InterWay agency and the Argentine Study Abroad Association (ARSAA)

“Accreditation UK gives us assuredness and peace of mind when choosing our educational providers.”

Elizabeth McLaren, Manager, Accreditation UK

“I’m sure the students I taught as an unqualified and inexperienced teacher at an unaccredited language centre in Europe before I started work with the British Council would have had a much better learning experience had the school been run according to British Council accreditation standards.

Many of the ELT accreditation schemes around the world were inspired by Accreditation UK and its predecessors. ELT quality assurance in Australia benefited from the input of our chief inspectors and lots of UK experience; a chief inspector and myself did a consultancy on quality assurance for the Maltese Department of Education and Department of Tourism. We’ve also briefed individual researchers and delegations seeking to improve standards of ELT teaching in other countries, including Japan, China, Kazakhstan.

“The most important thing Accreditation UK has done is the professionalisation and unification of UK ELT to give students a wide choice of high-quality courses in a range of settings. In its early days, the Scheme did a lot to professionalise ELT by setting standards for academic staff qualifications and the role of the academic manager. Then the merging of the Recognition Scheme and Courses Validation Scheme (in 1998) to create one quality assurance scheme and set of standards across the UK ELT sector.”

Jacqueline Gresham, chair of ASAC

“Accreditation UK has led ELT practice by ensuring that high quality standards have been developed, maintained, and continuously revised. It is supported by guidance and training for providers to help them achieve those standards. It is consultative and responsive to market changes.”

Timothy Blake, Chairman of The London School of English

“The scheme is a partnership with significant provider input. The scheme is realistic and is rooted in the real world of ELT. The practitioner involvement is a real strength. It is not only regrettable but also very ironic that as I understand it the Home Office was not willing to accredit AUK for Tier 4, requiring schools staying in that scheme to gain ISI accreditation, the reason given being that the scheme was not significantly arms-length. In my experience, far from giving schools an easy ride, the provider representatives in the system are often the most focused on high standards and the least tolerant of lapses.

“Certainly, when I was on the RAC (the body which did the work now done by ASEB and ASAC) the school members of that committee were almost always the most hawkish. One small anecdote: the RAC had asked one of its non-school members to do some work on the welfare performance of the inspected schools, and he wrote a report highlighting how good the grades were and how pleasing this was. Nonsense, replied a member representing the schools: the grades are good because the inspectors know very little about welfare and consistently over-mark the performance

of the schools they inspect. The whole thing needs to get tougher and more rigorous.”

Dr William B. Currie, The Edinburgh Language Foundation and Chairman, Association of Recognised English Language Schools (ARELS), 25 March 1982

“The announcement of the Council’s Recognition Scheme is, to my mind, of the greatest significance for the profession and, speaking for the ARELS sector, I congratulate the Council on taking on this important responsibility.”
