

# **NOTES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS APPOINTED IN BELGIUM 2014-15**

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Disclaimer: Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in these notes. However the British Council cannot accept responsibility for any errors which may exist or for any subsequent changes



## Notes for English Language Assistants appointed to Belgium 2014-15

Congratulations on your recent allocation to a post as an English Language Assistant in Belgium.

This document contains important information and advice regarding a variety of practical and administrative matters affecting UK assistants in Belgium. They should be read carefully, retained for reference and considered in conjunction with any papers issued by the Belgian authorities. It is important that you take this information with you whilst doing your year abroad in order to be able to consult it at all times when problems/questions arise.

If your permanent (UK) home address, personal e-mail or phone number should change at any time from now on, please inform us immediately by sending an e-mail to [assistants.uk@britishcouncil.org](mailto:assistants.uk@britishcouncil.org). We may need to contact you during the year with updates to these notes, invitations or urgent messages.

We hope that you find the following information useful and that you enjoy the year ahead.

Best wishes

Language Assistants Team, British Council

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## The basics

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### Co-operating partner

The assistantship programme in Belgium is administered by:

WBI (Wallonie-Bruxelles International)  
Place Sainctelette, 2  
1080 Bruxelles.  
Tel: 0032 (0)2 421 82 07  
Fax: 0032 (0)2 421 86 55

Marie-Sophie Wéry is specifically in charge of British Council ELAs  
E-mail: [ms.wery@wbi.be](mailto:ms.wery@wbi.be)

### Role of the Language Assistant

The role of a language assistant is a very important one and one that we hope you will enjoy. Please remember that you are a **paid member of staff** with the responsibilities and required professionalism that this entails. Please refer to our [website](#) for more information on your role.

As a language assistant you are also an **ambassador for the UK and its culture**. The way you behave will influence how those around you view the UK and you should endeavour to be a positive example. If you set a bad example, you could damage the reputation of the programme and adversely affect the experience of future assistants.

Your first-hand experience of life in the UK is an excellent resource and you should draw on this during your lessons. We provide a lot of advice to help you incorporate cultural content into your lessons.

It is important to be resourceful and use your initiative. If you do not think that you are being used sufficiently, make suggestions of topics that you could discuss with the students, activities you could do.

It is also very important to make sure that you are familiar with the education system in Belgium as this will help you know what to expect when you start teaching at your school(s). Please see the [Eurydice webpage](#) for specific information:

### Period of appointment

The period of appointment for UK assistants in Belgium next year will be 1 October to 31 May.

Assistants are expected to work 12 hours a week. Those who have been appointed to more than one school will be asked to divide their time between the schools concerned. You can request information regarding how your timetable will be arranged from the head of the host school which is usually the first one mentioned when you are sent details of your posting. If you have been appointed to two or three schools you should write to all of them confirming your acceptance of the post.

The maximum number of schools to which you can be appointed is three. Please contact us if you have been appointed to more than three schools. If the different schools are several miles apart and you have to travel between two on the same day, you are entitled to ask for help towards travel expenses. Under no circumstances should an assistant be required to buy a car just to get to their schools. If no regular public transport serves your school(s) and there are no lifts available to your school(s) please inform us of the situation.

Assistants are entitled to the usual school holidays (you should be able to obtain the dates from the school secretary). You should not be absent on other occasions without prior permission. Attending the induction course does not give assistants the right to take leave at a later date.

Each school differs as to when they organise appointments and send out information. The British Council is involved in passing on your application to our partner organisation in Belgium but has no control over choice of town, size of town, school environment or when information is sent out. You should also write immediately to your school(s) confirming acceptance of the post. If you do not receive a reply by mid-September it is a good idea to ring the school(s) to ask about accommodation and give them an idea of your anticipated arrival date.

You should also ask them for some information about the school(s) that you will be working in. For example, it may be useful to know the age range of pupils, the average class size, the general level of ability, the social background of pupils, the facilities availability and if you should bring any specific materials from home. It is also important to enquire about the dress code for teachers and any other general school information.

## Predecessors

Contact details of assistants appointed to Belgium were included in a separate email. It should be noted that schools do not necessarily receive assistants from the same Anglophone country each year, and the British Council holds records of assistants from the UK only. Past assistants have emphasised how useful it is to contact former assistants in their area and have described their advice as invaluable.

## Arrival

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### Passports and visas

Assistants must be in possession of a standard 10-year passport before leaving the UK and are advised to ensure that it will not need to be renewed before October 2014. Those who are not in possession of a passport, or need a new one, should complete the application procedure as soon as possible either through a regional Passport Office or online at: <https://www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/passports> Holders of a UK passport and nationals of other EU countries do not require a visa to enter Belgium.

Residents of the Channel Islands should check their individual situation with the nearest Belgian Consulate.

If you have dual nationality (UK/other) you should ensure that your UK passport is valid and you should use this one to travel while in Belgium. This will save you considerable complications with the local authorities (Social Security etc.). This does not apply if one of your passports is Belgian.

## Foreign Commonwealth Office Information

Before travelling to Belgium you should ensure that you check the [FCO's travel advice pages](#) and ensure that you have subscribed to updates so that you receive any important changes to the FCO's advice. During a crisis, advice for British nationals will be published on the travel advice website and updated regularly, so by subscribing you will ensure that you are aware of any updates. You can register for emails using this link:

<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKGOVUK/subscriber/new>

We also recommend that assistants read the 'Advice for Travellers' documentation provided by the FCO, which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/supporting-british-nationals-overseas/supporting-pages/advice-for-travellers>

## Residence permits

Nationals of EU countries do not need a work permit (*carte de travail*). However, soon after arrival all assistants must apply for a residence permit (*carte d'immatriculation*) at the *Bureau des Etrangers* in the town hall (*maison communale*). You will get through this procedure much more quickly if you go to the town hall in your local area rather than to the one in your nearest big city. When submitting your application, you will need to present all or most of the following items:

- a) *attestation* from the WBI (see paragraph 3)
- b) *contrat de bail ou attestation (si chez l'habitant)*, obtainable from school or landlord as appropriate;
- c) fee (price varies for each commune but should not be more than €25)

## Induction meeting

Details of the induction meeting in Brussels were included in your allocation email. At the welcome day you will be helped through your initial administration. After the necessary forms have been completed for the *Wallonie Bruxelles International* (WBI), you will be issued with the following documents: an *attestation*, a cheque covering your first month's payment; a *carte de boursier* which allows student discount for museums and exhibitions (but not transport) within the French-speaking Community of Belgium and a brochure containing practical information. You should keep photocopies of your *attestation* for your records.

## Travel to Belgium

You are responsible for the cost of your own travel and any travel to and from your place of appointment during the year. The following websites may help you when booking your travel:

<a href="http://www.raileurope.co.uk">www.raileurope.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.ryanair.com">www.ryanair.com</a>
<a href="http://www.eurostar.com">www.eurostar.com</a>	<a href="http://www.jet2.com">www.jet2.com</a>
<a href="http://www.directferries.co.uk">www.directferries.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.flybe.com">www.flybe.com</a>
<a href="http://www.eurolines.co.uk">www.eurolines.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.thomsonfly.com">www.thomsonfly.com</a>
<a href="http://www.skyscanner.net">www.skyscanner.net</a>	<a href="http://www.opodo.co.uk">www.opodo.co.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.britishairways.com">www.britishairways.com</a>	<a href="http://www.expedia.co.uk">www.expedia.co.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.easyjet.co.uk">www.easyjet.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.interrailnet.com/">http://www.interrailnet.com/</a>

Booking in advance for all forms of transport is highly recommended. Past assistants have warned to check the baggage allowance for outward and return journeys when travelling by plane as sometimes the cheaper airlines have quite a low baggage allowance.

Working as a language assistant gives you a great opportunity to travel around Belgium and you should make the most of your free time. Try to avoid coming home every holiday and experience as much of the surrounding area as possible

## Money matters

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### Monthly allowance

The net allowance for assistants in 2013/2014 is €872.55 per month. This could vary slightly for 2014/15. No deductions are made.

Reports received from this year's assistants confirm that it is advisable to **take not less than £500-£750 with you** to cover initial costs. This amount may differ depending on your location and how much rent you are required to pay in advance. Take the money in the form of traveller's cheques or ensure that your UK bank account is accessible via cash point outlets in Belgium. It is also advisable to take a credit card.

If you wish to supplement your income by giving private tuition in English, you are strongly advised **not** to advertise in local papers or public places. (Please read the relevant sections of our Personal Safety Leaflet which can be found at the bottom of the following page: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/language-assistants/become/what-next>) In general pupils are easily found through school or private connections, i.e. by word-of-mouth recommendation. However, it is essential to check that the other English teachers in your school(s) do not mind, so that you are not perceived to be 'stealing' their private pupils. The going rate for private one-to-one tuition seems to be €10-25 per hour depending on how much preparation for the lesson you plan to do and how much your pupils can afford.

### Erasmus grants

Language assistants who are currently on their compulsory year abroad **may** be entitled to an Erasmus grant. Please contact the Erasmus coordinator at your university for further information.

### Currency and banks

You are advised to wait until you get to your town of appointment in Belgium before opening a bank account. This will allow you to research all the local options, seek recommendations and choose what will be most convenient for the rest of the year. When opening an account, you will be required to present your passport, a copy of your *attestation* and your rent/tenancy agreement. Banks in Belgium generally shut at 4pm. Former assistants recommend to also take along your driving licence as identification when opening a bank account.

It is essential that you open a bank account as soon as possible after your arrival.

### Income tax

A Double Taxation Agreement exists between the UK and Belgium. Under this agreement UK assistants are normally exempt from Belgian income tax for a period of up to 2 years. However, it is normally the case that 100% of the remuneration received abroad will be liable for UK tax.



You are reminded that the UK tax year extends from 6 April to 5 April and that income earned in the UK between April and the start of your assistantship may be taken into account when your own or your parents' tax liability is being assessed.

If you decide to take on extra work during your assistantship, you are responsible for finding out in more detail about how you will be taxed.

Enquiries regarding UK income tax should be addressed to a local tax inspector, **not** to the British Council. We cannot assist you in this area because we are not trained in tax, cannot give advice on how your personal circumstances will affect your tax, and for data protection reasons. Please check <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/> for information about who to contact.

## Insurance

Since the money you receive in Belgium for your work as a language assistant is an allowance or *bourse* rather than a salary, and there are no deductions from it for social security, you are not covered by any Belgian health insurance scheme.

You are strongly recommended to take out travel insurance for the period between leaving home and taking up your appointment, and again for the period between ending your appointment and returning to the UK. The British Council is unable to advise on private insurance packages, you are recommended to consult an insurance broker for professional advice and to check whether you are covered by your parents' insurance policy. Undergraduate assistants may find that a "study abroad" policy purchased online may be an option. Please be aware that some insurance policies, usually 'backpackers' insurance, do not allow for trips home during the year and it is important to check the small print of your policy to make sure that you are covered.

It is essential that you have a European Health Insurance Card. The EHIC will give you the minimum health cover to which any UK citizen in an EU member-state is entitled and will be useful for trips to other EU countries during the year. Please see the Department of Health website on [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk) and enter "EHIC" in the Search box for links to a detailed explanation of the card and a link to download the form. You can also obtain an application form from the post office.

Residents of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are not eligible for the European Health Insurance Card. Residents of the Isle of Man need to take out fully-comprehensive insurance (which should include repatriation by air ambulance) before travelling to another country. Applicants from Guernsey should contact the Health and Social Services Department on: 01481 725241 for advice. Applicants from Jersey should contact the Employment and Social Security Department on: 01534 445505 for advice.

If you take regular medication, please ensure that you have a supply before you leave. It is also important to find out where your nearest doctor, dentist and hospital as soon as you arrive. You should ask your school for information about the facilities in your area and always advise staff and your landlord of any medical conditions.

In addition to health insurance, it would be wise to consider insuring your personal possessions. You should also check your parents' household insurance as this sometimes covers possessions away from home. Furthermore, cover for personal liability is often overlooked but it is extremely important. If you were the cause of an accident of any kind – e.g. cycling on the road – the resulting costs, practical and legal, could be prohibitively high.

WBI offers language assistants the 'civil responsibility insurance' (for the '*dommages cause à autrui*') via Ethias company.

## Administrative matters

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### Absence from school

Please remember that you are a member of staff and must therefore adhere to the holiday dates set by the school. If you cannot work because of illness you should inform your school(s) immediately by telephone. You may be asked to provide a letter from a doctor. This should cover the entire duration of the absence and must be sent to the school as soon as it is issued. Any prolonged absence on account of illness should be reported as soon as possible to the WBI and to the British Council.

Requests for leave of absence for any other reason should be made in advance to the head of the school(s) who is within his/her right to refuse it. You are reminded that if you are absent from school without prior authorisation; your allowance will be discontinued from the first day of your absence.

If it becomes necessary to resign from your post, you must give sufficient prior notice in writing of your intended departure to the school, the WBI and the British Council, setting out your reasons in full. If you are an undergraduate you must also inform your university/college in the UK.

### Solving problems

Conditions in schools in Belgium differ from those in this country and assistants may be asked to take groups larger than or different in type from those generally envisaged under the programme. Any difficulties should be discussed with your mentor teacher and/or the teacher of the class concerned in the first instance. If the problem cannot be solved then talk to the head teacher or get in touch with your contact at the local education authority (if applicable).

Satisfactory solutions can usually be found through such consultations but if the problem remains unresolved, you may contact Françoise Daout (02/42134012 or [francoise.daout@cfwb.be](mailto:francoise.daout@cfwb.be)) at the *Ministère de la Communauté Française de Belgique*, Bd Léopold II, 44, 1080 Bruxelles. You must copy Marie-Sophie Wéry at the WBI into any correspondence at [ms.wery@wbi.be](mailto:ms.wery@wbi.be).

For any administrative difficulties you encounter (e.g. problems with pay), please contact Marie-Sophie Wéry. The British Council in the UK will be happy to advise, but **problems are dealt with most quickly and effectively locally**.

To avoid problems at school, it is a good idea to form a good working relationship with other members of staff. You should introduce yourself to all members of the English department. It is important to be patient and polite and to be aware of the work pressure of others. Please remember that it is not good practice to correct the teacher in front of students. You should always be punctual, responsible and prepare adequately for your lessons. Furthermore, meeting regularly with your mentor gives the opportunity for them to give feedback about your performance and for you to raise any concerns or issues.

Do tell people if you have problems or if you need information as otherwise they will assume everything is ok. The authorities will not appreciate it if you suffer in silence and complain six months later. A lot of past assistants may tell you that their assistantship in Belgium was the

best year of their life. This can raise expectations and often leads to people feeling low especially during the first few weeks until they settle in.

## Settling In

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### Accommodation

Your schools are not obliged to provide or find you accommodation, but they may be able to offer you somewhere temporary to stay for the first few days or weeks, thus giving you some time to look for permanent accommodation. You should however not assume that your school will do this and should discuss your arrival and initial accommodation arrangements with them in advance. Please note that if your school does offer you accommodation you are not obliged to accept it but remember, if you do accept it, you will have to abide by the school's rules.

The first thing to do when looking for permanent accommodation is to ask your mentor teacher if they can recommend anything. For example, they may know a local family with a room to rent, or already have somewhere in mind for you to stay. If your school cannot help, your best contacts are your predecessors at the school or in the area.

Consider going to your teaching location to arrange accommodation in advance of the induction course or of starting your job. Past assistants have emphasised the need to look for accommodation as early as possible. The first weeks of your assistantship will be busy as you will be finding your way around an unfamiliar town, dealing with bureaucracy and trying to make a good impression at school. Having accommodation lined up can make this easier. For temporary lodgings while you look for something permanent, investigate the possibility of staying in a youth hostel. **Do not** take out a contract on your accommodation **until** you know the location of your schools.

**Please note that the British Council is not in a position to provide or to help find accommodation.**

Once you get to Belgium the following suggestions may be of interest:

- advertise on the school/staff notice board and ask around the staff; do **NOT** advertise in local papers or public places
- buy the local newspapers early in the morning and telephone likely numbers immediately
- ring the local university halls of residence or check their flat share adverts and notices, or advertise on their notice board that you are looking for a room
- ask local friends'/acquaintances' landlords if they have any further accommodation to let
- write to or visit as soon as possible any student or youth organisation in the area that might have details of available lodgings: the local tourist office may have a list of such organisations
- find out about local religious organisations as they often know of rooms to let
- accommodation agencies may be able to help but you should **be very wary** of paying large fees and deposits, and always read the small print in any leases or agreements to be signed. **Look for small agencies as often their fees are lower**
- search for a room or flat on the internet
- past assistants have mentioned the free small ads site "Vlan" ([www.immo.vlan.be](http://www.immo.vlan.be))

Some website you may find useful are:

Temporary accommodation:	<a href="http://www.hihostels.com">www.hihostels.com</a> <a href="http://www.hostelbookers.com">www.hostelbookers.com</a> <a href="http://www.hostelworld.com">www.hostelworld.com</a>
Permanent accommodation:	<a href="http://www.immoweb.be">www.immoweb.be</a> <a href="http://www.pap.be">www.pap.be</a> <a href="http://www.bruxelles-j.be/dossiers-bruxelles-j/te-loger-a-bruxelles">www.bruxelles-j.be/dossiers-bruxelles-j/te-loger-a-bruxelles</a> <a href="http://www.logement.ulg.ac.be">www.logement.ulg.ac.be</a>

We recommend that you take photos of your room and the flat when you move into your long-term accommodation and when you leave to help you get back any deposit you may have to pay, which is usually dependent on the accommodation being in the same condition as when you first arrived. When you leave your accommodation, remember to cancel any personal contracts e.g. internet or utilities.

A formal contract to rent an apartment sometimes requires the signature of a guarantor. If you do not know anyone resident in Belgium who is prepared to act as your guarantor (i.e. undertake to pay your rent/debts should you default), it may help if you have a formal letter from your parents, written in French, stating their financial guarantee (see suggested format enclosed). Alternatively, your *Responsable* or a friendly teacher at school might be prepared to 'take the risk'.

When letting property, landlords commonly ask for 1 or 2 months' rent as a deposit and 1 month's rent paid in advance. Always get a receipt for the money you pay, both deposit and rent.

When you do find accommodation, please ensure that you have checked health and safety issues (temporary and long term) such as fire alarms and exits, gas leaks, electrics, water etc.

When looking for accommodation please follow the advice given in our [Personal Safety leaflet](#). When you have found somewhere to live, even if it has been arranged for you, do not sign any agreement you are not comfortable with and make sure that there is a period of notice written in the contract to avoid problems should you decide to change your accommodation during the year.

## Creating social networks

Even if you have been to Belgium before, it is possible that you will find some things strange at first and will need a little time to settle in. On arrival, the thought of making friends and mixing with the locals can seem like a daunting task, but as long as you are prepared to put yourself out there, it is a part of the experience which previous assistants have found the most enriching. Give yourself some time to adjust – you don't need to feel like a local within a week and in the beginning you'll have a lot of administrative matters to deal with.

The best way to start is with colleagues at school. Make sure you always seem positive, enthusiastic and willing to learn. Socialise as much as you can with colleagues and accept all invitations to events, dinner etc. Tell people what your interests are and ask them to let you know what's going on in the local area. Do keep in mind that teachers can be very busy, especially during exam periods.

Apart from your work in the classroom you may be able to attend other classes in subjects which interest you. You will find that you become much more integrated into school life and gain considerably more from your stay if you become involved in activities organised by the school, such as sports days, theatre or music productions or modern language societies. Go to school 'open days' or parent evenings as these are also a good way of meeting people. If

you hear about something happening which interests you, ask if you can become involved. Don't wait to be invited as people may assume that you're not interested.

It is also a good idea to get in touch with other people in the area before you leave. One useful way to do this is to get in contact with a previous assistant in your region and ask them to give you any e-mail addresses or numbers of contacts they made. Another excellent way to meet new people is to set up language exchanges with local people who want to practise their English. You could also enrol at a local language school, join Erasmus societies (at a local university), offer English lessons to colleagues/locals, join a club and join assistant groups on social networks such as Facebook. There are often Facebook groups for people who are new to the city/town, which organise different events to help people make new friends - just search for 'new in "city name"' Previous assistants have also suggested joining a local Couchsurfing group as they often organise social activities.

**You should be very careful about how you use social networking sites while you are an ELA. Keep your profile private so that it can only be seen by people you intend to see it. If you invite other teachers to be 'friends', remember to remain professional in what you say on your wall and be careful what you say about your employer.**

**You should not exchange personal contact details with students, invite them to be 'friends' or accept similar invitations from them. This is likely to be regarded as inappropriate behaviour. Check with teachers about the school's internet policy, particularly regarding any online communication involving students either in or outside school.**

**It is exceptionally important that you understand issues around child protection, both to protect the students and also to protect you from any damaging and potentially serious accusations.**

Here are some other ways to meet people within the area:

- live with other students/native speakers
- enrol for an evening class, join a sports club, music group, choir etc.
- enquire about joining the local university and attending lectures
- get involved in the local culture and join clubs that you couldn't join in the UK
- volunteer for a charity, society, festival, etc.

Former assistants have recommended not spending all of your time with other assistants, as you won't be able to integrate into your community and life in Belgium. On the other hand, don't feel that you must cut yourself off from them – assistants can provide a very good support network for each other, as you understand each other's experiences. Don't forget that there may be language assistants from other countries in your area. You may wish to ask your employer if they have contact details.

As a golden rule, **try to say yes to every social opportunity presented to you** that does not compromise your personal safety. Accept invitations to places and activities even if they do not sound interesting as you might meet other people there who do share your interests.

## Travelling around

Once in Belgium you will find it cheaper for local travel to buy a *carnet* of tickets or a *carte urbaine*. In Brussels, journeys on trams, buses and the metro are charged at a flat rate for any distance and any number of changes of line for up to one hour; five-trip, ten-trip and monthly tickets offer better value. In Belgium holders of an ISIC card will in general be eligible to apply for an *abonnement scolaire*. (The school secretary should have details.)

Rail travel is extremely cheap in Belgium by comparison with the UK. Since Belgium is a small country, distances between towns are short: e.g. Liège-Brussels 1 hour 20 mins by rail, Tournai-Brussels 1 hour, Nivelles-Brussels 1/2 hour. There is also the *Thalys*, a high-



speed train service linking Belgian cities to the rest of north-west Europe. Taxis on the other hand are extremely expensive. For all rail information within Belgium look at the SNCB website [www.b-rail.be](http://www.b-rail.be).

Past assistants have described the *Go Pass* (10 single rail journeys of any length anywhere within Belgium, [www.brail.be/nat/E/tarifs/passes/go/](http://www.brail.be/nat/E/tarifs/passes/go/)) as “invaluable” and “a must”. It costs approximately €50 and is for young people aged under 26. *Multi Pass* (for groups of 2-5 people) works along similar lines and costs between €37-47. Other travel incentives include *Carte de Réduction 50%*, *Billet Week-End* and *Un jour à la mer ou en Ardenne*, which all give 50% reductions. There are also several discounts available for journeys to Belgian attractions, and under-26 year-olds get discounts on almost all forms of local and national travel in Belgium.

Please note that Belgian National Railways operate a train and cycle scheme at 18 stations: you collect a cycle from one station and may return it to another. The tickets include cycle hire and train fare. A selection of regional itineraries is available. Passengers are advised to reserve cycles in advance. More information is available from La Société Nationale de Chemins de Fer Belges (SNCB), and from the ‘Train+Vélo’ leaflets in train stations.

Museums, in many cases, offer free entry, some on the first Wednesday of each month. You can look on the following website for more details: <http://www.idj.be/gratos/index.lasso>.

Useful travel websites:	<a href="http://www.budgettravel.com">www.budgettravel.com</a>
<a href="http://www.lonelyplanet.com">www.lonelyplanet.com</a>	<a href="http://www.roughguides.com">www.roughguides.com</a>
<a href="http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree">www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree</a>	<a href="http://www.worldtravelguide.net">www.worldtravelguide.net</a>
<a href="http://wikitravel.org/en/Belgium">http://wikitravel.org/en/Belgium</a>	<a href="http://www.b-rail.be">www.b-rail.be</a>

## Personal safety

It is very important to stick to the same health and safety rules as you would at home and always heed advice given by local people. Please refer to the Personal Safety Leaflet (available to download here: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistants-looking-after-yourself.htm>) which provides an emergency telephone number as well as essential guidelines on how to avoid potentially dangerous situations.

We strongly advice that you spend some time looking at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website and check it regularly as there is a lot of useful and up-to-date information provided. We also recommend that assistants read the ‘Advice for Travellers’ documentation which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/supporting-british-nationals-overseas/supporting-pages/advice-for-travel>

**Please also refer to the FCO website for information regarding sexual attacks:** <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/when-things-go-wrong/rape>

## Taking a car abroad

If you plan to take a car to Belgium for the period of your assistantship, please ensure that you take out adequate insurance for the full period and **be aware that many insurance companies will only insure you for periods of up to 90 days**. Past assistants have advised looking into insurance well in advance in order to have the time to shop around for a suitable policy. All UK motor insurance policies offer the minimum legal protection required by EU countries and Switzerland. This gives third party cover for bodily injury or damage to property. The British Council is unable to recommend specific insurance companies.

Many insurers offer 24-hour UK telephone numbers in case you need help in an emergency. Make sure you have these details with you when you travel abroad.

The website of the Association of British Insurers ([www.abi.org.uk](http://www.abi.org.uk)) has general information on driving abroad, including the document 'Motoring Abroad' (see link below), which has useful information on Motor Insurance cover and Green Cards. A Green Card is an internationally recognised document that provides evidence that the policyholder has minimum insurance cover:

Motoring Abroad:

<https://www.abi.org.uk/~media/Files/Documents/Publications/Public/Migrated/Motor/ABI%20guide%20to%20motoring%20abroad.ashx>

If you require information on driver licensing you should contact Drivers Customer Services (DCS), Correspondence Team DVLA, Swansea SA6 7JL (Tel: 0300 790 6801, or using the online email service which can be found here:

<https://emaildvla.direct.gov.uk/emaildvla/cegemail/dvla/en/index.html>)

Information on vehicle licensing or registration can be obtained from Vehicle Customer Services (VCS), DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1AR (Tel: 0300 790 6802) There is also a website at [www.dvla.gov.uk](http://www.dvla.gov.uk). UK licences are recognised in all EU countries plus Switzerland, for as long as they remain valid.

Providing a car is not hired out or sold, nor used for commercial activity in Belgium, it can be imported under the Temporary Importation Scheme. You can obtain information about this from the AA, the RAC or your nearest Belgian Consulate. You will need to research the laws on driving in Belgium, including adapting your head lights for driving on the right. A former assistant recommended Halfords for information on this. In addition, if taking a car abroad you should make sure you have all your documents (i.e. logbook, insurance documents, driving licence) kept together in a folder. These are important as the police can stop you and ask for them.

## ISIC cards

International Student Identity Cards cost £9 and are available online and from student travel agents such as STA and BUNAC. They can be used to obtain cheap entry into certain museums, theatres, cinemas and art galleries throughout Europe. They may also entitle you to certain travel concessions. Please see [www.isiccard.com](http://www.isiccard.com) for further information. Please note that in order to obtain an ISIC card you need to be a full time student.

For non-students who are under 26 there is the International Youth Travel Card (£9), which can be bought in the same way – see <http://www.statravel.co.uk/youth-identity-card.htm> for further information.

All assistants under the age of 30 (or 26 depending on the country or region), can also buy the European Youth Card. Holders of the card are eligible for discounts at a range of places and on a range of services. For more information on the discounts and where you can buy the card, go to [www.euro26.org](http://www.euro26.org).

## Study opportunities

If you are appointed in or near a university town you may wish to attend lectures or seminars on a part-time basis. Preliminary advice can usually be obtained from the Belgian Embassy in London (<http://www.diplomatie.be/London/>, tel 020 7470 3700) and more detailed

information from the overseas students office of the particular establishment in Belgium. When enrolling, you should take with you your birth certificate, copies of your GCSE and A Level certificates and, if possible, a letter from your university/college in the UK confirming your current academic status. It is advisable also to take photocopies of all these documents, and a number of passport photographs. Holders of student cards from foreign universities are often eligible for a number of benefits including subsidised meals, accommodation services and reductions on theatre/cinema tickets.

If you are appointed in a town where there is little or no possibility of access to a university, you should not ignore study opportunities offered by local cultural centres, institutes, libraries and colleges of further education: contact the local tourist office for details. Much can also be gained from sitting in on school lessons in a variety of subjects.

### Phoning home & mobiles

Buy a phonecard as soon as possible on arrival in Belgium: there are very few coin-operated payphones. As regards mobile phones, previous assistants have mentioned the providers Mobistar and Proximus and pay-as-you-go. The British Council is unable to make recommendations for mobile phone providers and is simply passing feedback on.

Be aware that calls to the UK from a mobile can be expensive. Previous assistants have recommended using Skype and [www.voipbuster.com](http://www.voipbuster.com) as an alternative.

### Useful websites

You can read case studies written by former assistants on our website:  
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistants-ela-success-stories-main-page-2.htm>

Year Abroad Advice: [www.thirdyearabroad.com](http://www.thirdyearabroad.com)

Further information about Belgium:

[www.visitbelgium.com](http://www.visitbelgium.com)  
[www.belgiumtheplaceto.be](http://www.belgiumtheplaceto.be)  
[www.bruxelles-j.be](http://www.bruxelles-j.be)

### Teaching tips and resources

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#### Observation period

When you first arrive at your school(s) you should ask for a period of observation of 1-2 weeks. It may not be offered to you automatically. Observation will allow you to familiarise yourself with the school environment, to experience classroom management techniques as well as to get to know the names, faces and personalities of your pupils and gauge their level of English.

Try to note the following:

- how the teacher starts and ends the lesson
- how the teacher speaks to pupils
- how the teacher involves all pupils, including shy ones, in the class activity
- what the teacher's attitude is to pupil errors and error correction



- how the teacher controls disruptive behaviour, lateness and lack of effort

## British Council teaching resources

The British Council produces and co-produces a range of resources specifically for Language Assistants. Making use of these will help you greatly to deliver interesting and useful classroom activities and will support you in solving problems in the classroom.

The British Council is also closely involved with the teaching of English abroad. Local branches develop useful resources and organise a range of cultural activities, which may be of interest to you and your school. For information on forthcoming events, go to [www.britishcouncil.org/brussels.htm](http://www.britishcouncil.org/brussels.htm).

Please note that many foreign schools are anxious to establish links with UK counterparts in order to share information and arrange pupil exchanges. Assistants are encouraged to help in whatever way possible in establishing such links and there is information and guidance on the British Council website: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-ie-school-partnerships>.

You may also wish to find out if your school has any eTwinning projects or set up a project yourself: [www.britishcouncil.org/etwinning.htm](http://www.britishcouncil.org/etwinning.htm)

## Language Assistants manual

'Language Assistant' by Clare Lavery is a resource book designed for language assistants and provides information on all aspects of the role. This can be downloaded here: [www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/whole\\_manual.pdf](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/whole_manual.pdf). Please read this carefully as it is extremely useful in preparing you for your assistantship.

## TeachingEnglish website

TeachingEnglish.org is an online resource centre produced jointly by the British Council and the BBC has a specialised Language Assistants micro-site: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/language-assistant>

On the site you will have access to:

- Teaching tips
- Essential UK: Seasonal lesson plans based around UK topics
- Primary tips: Help getting started with primary-level students
- Classroom games

## LearnEnglish website

The [British Council Learn English](http://www.britishcouncil.org/learn-english) website is an excellent free online resource for students of English with lots of games, stories, listening activities and grammar exercises:

This may be a useful tool for you to use for your teaching but also to pass on to your students for them to access from home.

## Facebook page

Our Facebook page provides an opportunity to discuss teaching ideas and share your experience with other assistants (we send approximately 3000 Language Assistants around the world each year).

[https://www.facebook.com/EnglishLanguageAssistants.BritishCouncil?ref=tn\\_tnmn](https://www.facebook.com/EnglishLanguageAssistants.BritishCouncil?ref=tn_tnmn)

## Teaching materials

One way of making language learning real for your pupils is bringing authentic materials from the UK into the classroom. Take the opportunity to collect a variety of resources while you are still at home.

Past assistants have found that the following materials worked well: Photos of family and friends and your home town, lots of postcards, examples of UK coins and notes, train tickets and timetables, stamps, posters and tea towels to decorate walls, Christmas cards and crackers, posters and games, UK TV programmes and listings, magazines and local newspapers, CDs, photos of school uniforms, a school timetable and school report, flashcards, word searches, maps, tourist brochures, UK food (marmite, jelly, chocolate, custard, mince pies, gravy granules, etc), adverts, menus, cartoons, comic books, DVDs (e.g. Ready Steady Cook for catering students), simple recipes e.g. scones, recordings of the weather forecast, London tube map, tapes of friends' accents and conversations, bingo, Taboo etc.

The more materials you can find the better. Think about what worked well for you as a language student and about which items you find interesting when you are in a foreign country. You can also ask your host school(s) whether there is something specific they would like you to bring and to find out about topics you are likely to be asked to cover during your assistantship.

## Useful teaching websites

Teaching websites	<a href="http://www.onestopenglish.com">www.onestopenglish.com</a>
<a href="http://www.englishclub.com">www.englishclub.com</a> *	<a href="http://www.bogglesworldesl.com">www.bogglesworldesl.com</a>
<a href="http://www.cambridgeesol.org/teach">www.cambridgeesol.org/teach</a> *	<a href="http://www.developingteachers.com">www.developingteachers.com</a>
<a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/teachers">http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/teachers</a> *	<a href="http://www.tes.co.uk">www.tes.co.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.letssingit.com">www.letssingit.com</a>	<a href="http://projectbritain.com">http://projectbritain.com</a>
<a href="http://www.lyrics.com">www.lyrics.com</a>	<a href="http://www.slideshare.net/">http://www.slideshare.net/</a>
<a href="http://www.enchantedlearning.com">www.enchantedlearning.com</a>	<a href="http://www.prezi.com">www.prezi.com</a>
<a href="http://www.cartoonstock.com">www.cartoonstock.com</a>	<a href="http://www.busyteacher.org">www.busyteacher.org</a>
<a href="http://www.puzzlemaker.com">www.puzzlemaker.com</a>	<a href="http://www.eslprintables.com/">http://www.eslprintables.com/</a>
<a href="http://www.skyline-english.com">www.skyline-english.com</a>	<a href="http://www.vanda51.blogspot.com/">http://www.vanda51.blogspot.com/</a>
<a href="http://www.eslcafe.com">www.eslcafe.com</a>	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk">www.bbc.co.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.eslpartyland.com">www.eslpartyland.com</a> *	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc">www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc</a>
<a href="http://www.eslgold.com">www.eslgold.com</a>	<a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk">http://news.bbc.co.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.esl-lab.com">www.esl-lab.com</a>	<a href="http://www.royal.gov.uk">www.royal.gov.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.eslflow.com">www.eslflow.com</a>	
<a href="http://www.eslflashcards.com">www.eslflashcards.com</a>	<a href="http://www.visitbritain.com">www.visitbritain.com</a>
<a href="http://funschool.kaboose.com/">http://funschool.kaboose.com/</a>	<a href="http://www.visitscotland.com">www.visitscotland.com</a>
<a href="http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/kids">www.learnenglish.org.uk/kids</a>	<a href="http://www.discovernorthernireland.com">www.discovernorthernireland.com</a>
	<a href="http://www.discovernorthernireland.com">www.discovernorthernireland.com</a>

## Miscellaneous

Co-operating partners abroad have requested that the attention of British visitors be drawn to the severe penalties imposed for drug offences and for taking part in unlawful political demonstrations which may result in heavy fines and prison sentences. You are therefore strongly advised not to become involved in these activities.

Married students should note that the allowance is intended to provide for one person only. However, if an assistant's spouse remains in the UK and is unemployed, he/she may be barred from income support or be required to refund whatever was received as such since the start of the assistantship. Enquiries should be made well in advance in order to prevent financial difficulties from arising during a married assistant's period of appointment.

Please note the British Council is not the employer of UK assistants abroad and should not be given as a referee in future job applications. In general the head of the school would be the most appropriate referee.

## Useful contacts

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### British Embassy and consulates in Belgium:

Please take note of the address of the Embassy below in case of emergency or loss of your passport.

The British Embassy  
Avenue d'Auderghem 10  
Oudergemlaan  
1040 Brussels  
☎ +32 (0) 2 287 6248  
<http://ukinbelgium.fco.gov.uk/en/>

### Emergency services in Belgium

Emergency numbers are 101 (for the police), 100 (for medical services) and 112 (from a mobile phone).

## Book list

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### Dictionaries

- BBC English Dictionary (BBC English/Harper Collins)
- Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Longman)
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Oxford University Press)
- Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture (Longman)

### Grammar reference books

- A Practical English Grammar (A.J. Thomson & A.V. Martinet, Oxford University Press)
- Current English Grammar (S. Chalker, Phoenix)
- Basic English Usage (M. Swan, Oxford University Press)
- Practical English Usage (M. Swan, Oxford University Press)
- Discover English (R. Bolitho & B. Tomlinson, Macmillan Heinemann)
- English Grammar in Use (R. Murphy, Cambridge University Press)

- Advanced Grammar in Use (R. Murphy, Cambridge University Press)
- How English Works (Michael Swan and Catherine Walter, Oxford University Press)
- Learner English (Michael Swan & Bernard Smith (eds.) Cambridge University Press)

### Basic methodology books

- The Practice of English Language Teaching J. Harmer Longman
- How to Teach English J. Harmer Longman
- How to Teach Grammar S. Thornbury Longman
- How to Use the Internet in ELT D. Teeler & P. Gray Longman
- One to One Peter Wilberg Language Teaching Publications

Also look out for the series of handbooks and source books for language teachers published by CUP, Longman, Macmillan and OUP.

### Quotes

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“Get involved. It is only through participation that you will derive the enormous benefits that this year will give you. Many of my fondest memories are from extra-curricular clubs, sports and other activities I became involved in.”

“Work hard and you will not only feel proud but also appreciated by those you work with!”

“Be professional. It is a job so treat it as such. If you’ve got any problems, discuss them straight away and get the problem sorted out early on.”

“It is surprising how fast the seven months will go so it is important to take advantage of every opportunity and to not let the language barrier get in the way.”

“When taking classes, always have a plan B, and a plan C ready!”

“If you feel homesick, get yourself out of the house!! Don't say no to anything.”

“Don't be shy! Try everything, talk to anyone you can, get involved and keep busy. Be sensible but take risks. It doesn't matter if you make mistakes, you are new to the country and culture and you're learning a language. Do things with your classes you would like to have done in language assistants' classes at school/university. Make the most of it, it flies by!”

“Bite the bullet and ring your mentor as soon as you have their number – don't wait for them to ring you.”

“Be confident and use English in the class-room. Don't let on you speak their language otherwise they will never speak English.”

“Even if you end up in a place/situation that wasn't quite what you were expecting, be determined to make the best of it, open to people and opportunities and you'll have a wonderful time.”

“Don't take things too personally because to school kids you're a new, strange foreign person in their classroom with a funny accent. They may giggle or not answer because they're embarrassed, but after a while you will build up a rapport with them.”

“The most important thing is to try to make friends with local people - they can show you all the best sights and introduce you to their friends, too.”

“This experience has taught me and showed me the fulfilling feeling that is experienced once you realise that you can have an impact on a young person's life.”

"I always gave out a handout in lessons. I found that the students needed something physical to look at and base the lesson on. They would lose attention very quickly if there was a completely speaking based lesson."

"Enjoy it - if you get asked to do things and it is safe to attend - do it! I spent one weekend mushroom picking, it was a great experience even if I'd never do it again!"

"The best piece of advice that I received and would offer to future assistants is never turn down any invitations! Then you will make friends, not feel lonely and have no regrets."

"The assistantship is one of the most rewarding, interesting and downright fun jobs I've had."