

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS PROGRAMME**  
COLOMBIA

# **COLOMBIA COUNTRY NOTES 2019-20**

Document compiled by British Council: Information correct 04/07/19. We are aware that information can change throughout the year. Please inform us should you discover any errors.

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# NOTES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS APPOINTED TO COLOMBIA IN 2019-20

This document is Country Notes for the 2019/20 English Language Assistants Programme in Colombia. Any previous country notes relating to previous years should be ignored for the 2019/20 academic year.

**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 change.

## FOREWORD

Congratulations on your recent allocation to a post as an English Language Assistant in Colombia. Every year, around 2,500 Language Assistants from the UK support the teaching of English in 14 countries around the world. Each one is taking part in a programme that traces its heritage back to 1905. It began as an exchange programme to allow graduates from France to help English students learn French, with 'young Masters in English secondary schools' heading to France to perform a similar role. Shortly afterwards, a similar agreement was reached with the government of Prussia.

Since those early days, the programme has endured major global events, two World Wars, and the Great Depression, to name a few. But while the global political, social and economic landscapes may have changed over the years, the Language Assistants initiative has remained committed to increasing language skills across the world.

This document contains important information and advice regarding a variety of practical and administrative matters affecting UK assistants in Colombia. This document should be read carefully, retained for reference and considered in conjunction with any papers issued by British Council Colombia or the Ministry of Education. It is important that you take this information with you whilst undertaking 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, please inform us immediately by sending an e-mail to [languageassistants.uk@britishcouncil.org](mailto:languageassistants.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,

British Council Language Assistants Team

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## FOREWORD

Colombia's geography is amongst the most diverse in South America. It is the only South American country which borders both the Pacific and the Caribbean. Its nearly 50 million inhabitants form an ethnic melting pot and are generally seen as very hospitable. The official language is Spanish, although having other 68 ethnic languages and dialects, and the country is predominantly Roman Catholic.

Colombia did not enjoy a good reputation for a long time, especially during the 80's and 90's. Media coverage may have given the world the impression that it's a lawless domain of drug lords and guerrillas. The country endured the largest and longest guerrilla insurgency on the continent and is also one of the world's major producers of cocaine. However, today, the picture is quite different and in reality Colombia has a relatively stable economy with violence diminishing greatly in recent years, particularly after the signing of the peace agreement with the largest guerrilla group FARC and has evidenced a high number of foreign visitors. We strongly recommend paying attention to the British Council's Colombia advice on security during the induction briefing in Bogotá.

## 1.0 CO-OPERATING PARTNERS

### 1.1 BRITISH COUNCIL

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust.

We work with over 100 countries across the world in the fields of [arts and culture](#), [English language](#), [education](#) and [civil society](#). Each year we reach over 20 million people face-to-face and

more than 500 million people online, via broadcasts and publications. Founded in 1934, we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body.

Our work in English aims to bring high-quality language materials to every [learner](#) and [teacher](#) who wants them. In developing and post-conflict countries, we teach English and train teachers through radio, web and TV broadcasts. We offer more than three million UK [examinations](#) worldwide, helping people gain access to trusted qualifications to support their career and study prospects.

Our work in [education](#) and [society](#) helps transform national education systems, builds more inclusive and open societies and increases [young people's opportunities](#). We encourage international students to come and study in the UK, and British students to experience life abroad. We bring [schools](#) around the world together, so young people and teachers from different countries can learn from each other.

Our work in the [arts](#) involves the very best of British and international artistic talent. We help increase audiences for international work in the UK and for UK work globally. We bring artists together and support the development of skills and policy in the arts and creative industries. Through this work, we ensure that culture in its broadest sense plays a vital role in helping people to connect with and understand each other.

In these ways, the British Council builds links between UK people and institutions and those around the world, helping to create trust and lay foundations for prosperity and security around the world.

### 1.2 COOPERATING PARTNER

The Language Assistants Programme in Colombia is coordinated in partnership with ICETEX – the Colombian Institute of Educational Credit and Technical Studies Abroad. The British Council in the UK liaises with the British Council in Colombia which deals directly with ICETEX.

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## 2.0 ROLE OF A LANGUAGE ASSISTANT

The role of a language assistant is a very important one and one that we hope you will enjoy. Remember that you are a paid member of staff with responsibilities and required professionalism that this entails. Assistants will be based in universities, often providing support to the teacher training programs. You will be expected to take your teaching duties seriously and be committed to the demands of the role. Please refer to our website for more information on your role as an [English Language Assistant](#).

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 so 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. Please see the section entitled 'Teaching Resources' for classroom tips and resources.

## 2.1 TEACHING ENGLISH

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 or activities that you could get involved with. This document contains a whole chapter about teaching English, but to get started the following links are useful.

- [http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teaching/files/pub\\_whole\\_manual.pdf](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teaching/files/pub_whole_manual.pdf)
- [www.teachingenglish.org.uk/language-assistant/essential-uk](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/language-assistant/essential-uk)

In order to ensure a positive professional experience and avoid potential problems, consider these steps:

- Try to form a good working relationship with other members of staff
- Introduce yourself to all members of the English department
- Be patient and polite, and be aware of the work pressures of others
- Do not correct the teacher in front of students
- Be punctual, responsible and prepare adequately for your lessons
- Meet regularly with your mentor teacher. This gives them the opportunity to provide feedback about your performance and for you to raise any concerns or issues.

Do tell people if you have any issues or if you need information, as otherwise they will assume everything is okay. Should any difficulties arise in relation to teaching, you should follow the lines of referral outlined in section 9.4.

## 2.2 OBSERVATION PERIOD

When you first arrive, 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 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.

The size of the class can vary from approximately 25 - 50 students depending on the institution.

## 3.0 ALLOCATION

### 3.1 PERIOD OF APPOINTMENT

The period of appointment for UK assistants in Colombia next year will be for from the last week in July 2019– May 2020. The number of hours worked will be 18 per week (these may be daytime, evening or Saturday classes). If you are occasionally asked to work additional hours (covering classes etc), we recommend that you comply and reach an agreement on how to deal with those extra hours (i.e. half a day off). If, however, this becomes a regular request please inform your mentor teacher to resolve this problem. If you are requested to attend staff meetings outside of your 18 hour week, you will be required to attend.

### 3.2 HOLIDAYS

There are three holiday periods during the year at Christmas, Easter (Semana Santa) and half-term (between semesters). The length of time

that you will be given off work during these holiday periods is decided by the institution, and must be adhered to (be advised that some institutions will receive greater holiday periods than others, but the British Council has no control over this and as an employee of the institution, you must respect the holiday periods given).

You should not be absent on other occasions without prior written permission.

## 3.3 STAYING FOR A CONSECUTIVE YEAR

It is possible for ELAs to stay for a consecutive year in Colombia. You can apply for a consecutive year. Further information will be provided to candidates in due course.

## 4.0 PRE-DEPARTURE

### 4.1 FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) has a wealth of resources we recommend you utilise. Before travelling to Colombia, you should:

- Check the FCO's travel advice pages and subscribe 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.
- Read the 'Support for British National Abroad' documentation provided by the FCO, which can be found [here](#)
- Follow the FCO social media pages for up-to-date alerts and information.

## 4.2 PASSPORTS & VISAS

Before leaving the UK you must be in possession of a passport, valid until at least October 2020.

You will have to apply for a courtesy visa via the Colombian Consulate website. Your visa will be issued and emailed to you electronically you will then have to make an appointment at the Colombian Consulate in London to have your visa stamped into your passport. You will receive, from British Council Colombia/ICETEX, the visa letter for you to take with you to this appointment. When this is sent, you can then make an appointment. Please do not try and make your appointment until you have received this as you will need the letter and the consulate must have received official authorization from Colombia in order to start the process.

In order to be able to apply for a visa you will need:

- Your passport (valid at least until October 2020 with a minimum of 2 blank pages)
- Photocopy of the main page of the passport containing your personal information and photocopies of any pages of your passport which have been stamped at immigration on previous trips to Colombia and any previous Colombian visas.
- 2 passport photos, with your name written on the reverse
- Proof of the activities to be carried out whilst in Colombia (document provided by ICETEX)

N.B. If your visa isn't ready before departure, you will have to enter with a tourist visa, which is only valid for two months. In this case, you will be required to show evidence that you have a return flight booked to the UK departing within 2 months of your arrival in Colombia.

*Please bear in mind that visa procedures may vary from year to year. The British Council tries to obtain the latest information on your visa requirements but we are unable to accept any liability if the information provided here differs from what the Consulate requires from you.*

## 4.2 INSURANCE

**You are required to take out comprehensive insurance cover for the duration of your time in Colombia.** It is important to cover medical and other expenses, personal accident and personal liability, luggage and personal possessions and cancellation charges.

The British Council will not be responsible for you while you are in Colombia, although we will offer support when necessary.

If you do fall ill, make sure you keep copies of all medical bills, receipts or other documents, as you will then need these to make a claim.

The British Council is unable to advise on private insurance packages, so 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 is 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 be clear on the coverage provided. We recommend you research the various options available and consult other/ former assistants before purchasing a suitable policy. **However, any insurance you purchase should include cover for emergency treatment and repatriation.**

## 4.3 DOCUMENTS TO TAKE

We recommend that you scan important documents before leaving the UK and email these to yourself so that you have access to them while you are away. Documents you may need access to include; birth certificate (although you should not need the original) and scanned copies of the photo page of your passport, visa and driving licence (take this with you). You should carry a photocopy of the photo page of your passport rather than the original and always have this on you as a means of ID. We also recommend learning your passport number as you may need it to fill in multiple forms. It is also worth having a couple of passport sized photos to take with you as you may need these for various ID cards or in the event of losing your passport.



## 5.0 MONEY MATTERS

### 5.1 MONEY MATTERS

The monthly allowance for 2019-2020 will be \$2.484.000 Colombian pesos which is significantly higher than the minimum national salary. This is about £738 per month at the time of writing (June 2019).

Please note that due to governmental or institutional bureaucracy, some of you may occasionally experience delays in receipt of your allowance. If this occurs, please try to solve the problem with the administrative staff at your university as well as your mentor first. If the problem remains unresolved, please inform the British Council Colombia, so that we can do what we can to speed the process along. You will also receive comprehensive medical insurance coverage provided by ICETEX. These benefits, both your salary and health insurance, actually exceeds most local teachers receive. You are strongly advised to be sensitive to this when dealing with other teachers.

Lastly, it is very important that if you do go ahead with having any other source of income, you do not sign any sort of contract or legal agreement with any other entity but your university. This is because you aren't on a work visa, but a 'courtesy' one meaning you can only collaborate with the university that is sponsoring your visa.

Based on the information we received from your predecessors in previous years, it is advisable to leave the UK with a minimum of £1000 plus access to funds in a UK bank account to cover expenses for the first few weeks. Please note that you may experience a delay in receiving your first salary payment. This can take up to six to eight weeks after your arrival. You should therefore not count on this money being received at the end of your first month.

### 5.2 ADDITIONAL INCOME

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**). In general pupils are easily found through school or private connections, i.e. by word-of-mouth. 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.

### 5.3 BANKS

We recommend having access to your UK bank account throughout the year, making sure that you have sufficient funds in case of delays to your allowance payment. ATMs are very common in Colombia and they are the best way to get money. Credit cards are widely accepted, but when using these please keep in mind that some businesses add a surcharge of 5-10% onto your purchases. The actual amount you will have to pay is also dependent on the exchange rate. Many ELAs use a cash card that often doesn't charge for using your card abroad and isn't linked to your British bank account.

Be aware that you are often charged for using your UK debit card to withdraw money abroad. You may wish to check what your bank will charge you to use this service. Your monthly allowance is adequate to survive on, but you will need more if you intend to travel. Please remember to inform your British banks that you will be living in Colombia for six months so as to avoid your British cards being blocked when you try to use them.

### 5.4 LOST OR STOLEN CREDIT CARDS

If a credit card is lost or stolen, you should call your bank immediately to cancel it. If stolen, the theft should be reported to the police.

### 5.5 GRADUATES WITH STUDENT LOANS

If you will be overseas for more than 3 months, you will need to let student finance know. Complete an Overseas Income Assessment Form to enable the Student Loans Company to calculate how much you need to repay. On the **Overseas Income Assessment Form**, you

should provide them with details of your circumstances and prospective income.

Whilst in Colombia the money you receive is considered a monthly allowance or grant, rather than a salary. This means you are officially taking part in a grant funded mobility programme rather than formal employment. Previous assistants who declared their Language Assistant role as formal employment rather than a grant funded mobility programme faced challenges with the student loans company, who requested copies of employment contracts.

You will be required to provide evidence of income or means of support. They will then send you a repayment schedule showing how much you need to pay each month. Your monthly payments will be based upon the earnings threshold for your destination country. More information can be found online [here](#). Please note that the British Council cannot advise further on student loans matters.

## 6.0 HEALTH & WELLBEING

Please visit the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) website for more information regarding healthcare in [Colombia](#).

For information on **insurance cover**, please see section 4.2 of this document.

### 6.1 VACCINATIONS

We strongly recommend that you consult your GP and get information on the vaccinations needed for Colombia before you travel. The NHS website, [Fit for travel](#), is also a useful starting point. Please note the British Council is unable to pay for your vaccines.

### 6.2 MEDICATION

Make sure that if you need specific medication you bring a large enough supply to cover your time abroad. Label it clearly before boarding a plane. If you have to carry syringes or needles, please remember to get a letter from your GP explaining their medical necessity. We also recommend checking your airline's website to

see whether any other documentation is needed. Country specific information and advice can be found on the National Travel Health Network and Centre [website](#).

## 6.3 MENTAL HEALTH

Although working abroad can be enjoyable, it can also be challenging. Lack of familiar support systems, disrupted daily routines, language barriers, culture shock and unexpected situations can intensify stress levels rather than alleviate them.

Your mental health is just as important as your physical health. You are advised to read the leaflet emailed to you even if you are not currently suffering from mental health problems.

The Foreign Commonwealth Office provides information about mental health and travel via the following links. The advice contains guidance on travelling abroad and mental health, and information about how the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) is able to assist British nationals with mental health needs abroad. The leaflets detail the type of assistance you may find in the country. The leaflet also explains some of the differences between English law and practice and that of other countries.

[Mental Health: Travelling Abroad](#)

[Mental Health: Travelling Abroad Checklist](#)

## 7.0 ARRIVAL

### 7.1 INDUCTION

You will be expected to arrive in Bogotá on or before 22<sup>nd</sup> July to attend a three-day welcome briefing and orientation session by British Council in Colombia on the 23-25<sup>th</sup> July, The accommodation during those days (22, 23, 24) will be provided by ICETEX.

After the induction course you will make your way to your host city to begin your placement.

You will receive details of this directly from the British Council Colombia.

If you have been allocated to an institution outside of Bogotá you will have to cover the cost of onward travel which is likely to be between £70 and £90 depending on the location. You could ask your mentor teacher for further advice.

The date of your first teaching day depends on your host institution but it will be during the first week of August and it is expected that you will travel to your final destination directly after the induction.

## 7.2 OBTAINING YOUR ID CARD AND DEALING WITH MIGRACIÓN COLOMBIA

Once you arrive in Colombia you will have to apply for an ID card at the office of Migración Colombia (former DAS) from the Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores. It is obligatory to have this card to prove you are in the country legitimately. You will also need this ID card in order to be able to open a bank account. This costs around £40 plus £5 for a so-called 'Blood Certificate' which means a blood sample will be taken in order to confirm your blood group. If you already have an official document which confirms your blood group this test might not be necessary. The result needs to indicate your blood group and Rhesus factor.

Your ID card should be issued in the town or city where you will be doing your assistantship and living. Your mentor teacher should accompany you when you issue this card.

It is very important that you report to the Migración Colombia office of this town within 15 days of arriving in the country. If you will be staying for more than 15 days elsewhere in Colombia, prior to arriving at your placement town, it is essential that you report to the Migración Colombia office wherever you are in order to receive an interim document (salvoconducto) to prove you have reported to Migración Colombia within 15 days, but have not yet had your ID card issued at your town of residence.

If you do not visit a Migración Colombia office within 15 days of arrival into Colombia, you may be liable to pay significant fines and charges.

If you have any doubts about this part of the process, please send details of your plans for travel, with dates, to David Vallejo (david.vallejo@britishcouncil.org).

## 7.3 AGREEMENT WITH HOST INSTITUTION

As soon as you arrive please ask your host institution to provide you with an agreement. In some cases institutions have taken several months to sort a contract out which resulted in delays of payments. When you receive your agreement please read it carefully and make sure you understand exactly what is written in it before you sign anything. In some cases assistants might receive a new agreement at the beginning of the second semester. Please read it again carefully to make sure you understand exactly what you sign. Agreements can vary from institution to institution as they are usually agreed by the regional ICETEX office. Please be aware that if you break your agreement, ICETEX will cancel your work permit/visa and you will be requested to return to the UK.

Once you have signed an agreement with your host institution, you will be unable to withdraw from the programme. If an extreme situation arises, in which you think that you will be unable to continue in the programme, please contact the British Council in Colombia as soon as possible.

## 7.3 ACCOMMODATION

You should contact your mentor to ask about temporary accommodation for the first two weeks of your assistantship; accommodation for these two weeks may be paid by your host institution. They may also be able provide advice about longer-term accommodation.

Temporary accommodation may be arranged for the first 1-2 weeks in your town/city, but this will depend on the institution and you will have to sort out permanent accommodation yourself. Please check this with your mentor teacher who should be able to tell you what to expect and give advice

and help. You may also wish to check with your predecessor if applicable. 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 institution. Please note that the British Council is not able to provide or help find accommodation.

Once you get to Colombia, 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
- 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
- contact 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 their fees are often lower
- search for a room or flat on the internet

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 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. Once 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. When you leave your accommodation, remember to cancel any personal contracts e.g. internet or utilities.

## 8.0 SETTLING IN

In Latin America there is often a culture of informality which might give the impression of a lack of organisation and forward planning. Things may tend to happen at the very last minute and many assistants from the UK find it hard to adjust to what they consider to be a disorganised society. Usually what is lacking in forward planning is made up for in making newcomers feel welcome. However, you will need to prepare yourself for potential frustrations particularly at a bureaucratic level, even prior to departure, for example when it comes to finding out specific details regarding your post and visa applications.



Showing an interest in Colombian culture, especially football, nature and music will certainly endear you to the locals. We recommend you read up as much as possible before you go as this will help you make conversation and talk knowledgeably to people you meet in the first few weeks.

## 8.1 CULTURE SHOCK

Even if you have travelled to non-European destinations before, you might feel slightly overwhelmed in the beginning by your experience. Some areas can be very poor and you might struggle to accept this. Latin America is also known for its alleged chaos. Be open to changes of plans (social and at work), lessons cancelled at the last minute etc. A different climate and location as well as feeling jet lagged after the long flight and struggling with speaking Spanish all day long might lead to temporary disorientation, self-consciousness and exhaustion. This usually leads to feeling homesick but please be assured that this is a very common and normal feeling which usually disappears after a few weeks or even days.

There are some ways which might help you to overcome this initial culture shock. Try not to be too hard on yourself; yes, you have come to Colombia to live and work there but that does not mean that you have to be like one of the locals within a week. Give yourself time to get over the jet lag and to explore your area. Do not stay in contact only with UK assistants during your assistantship as this might lead to your feeling alienated for the whole time of your appointment. However, it is important that you contact them and your family and friends back home in the beginning to tell them about your experiences. Other assistants can be a great support, as they are going through the same process. Once you have met local people and have tackled bureaucracy, you will realise that life in Colombia gets much easier and you will have an enjoyable time. Religion and family play an important role in everyday life so, although you may at first feel like an outsider, once you have proved your interest in local people and their culture, you are likely to be welcomed into these tight-knit groups.

The way you behave and represent the UK will shape the view of the UK of those Colombians with whom you are in contact. There are a number

of frustrations that Language Assistants to Latin America frequently feel; attitudes towards timekeeping in Latin America can be somewhat lax, particularly in social settings (although you will be expected to be punctual to your classes) Machismo and general gender issues might be something which female assistants, in particular, struggle to manage, and unwanted attention in the street should be expected by female assistants. Discourage this by dressing appropriately and trying to blend in. Bureaucracy can also be very tiresome. Do not get angry as this usually does not lead to any results – especially when dealing with people in authority. Ultimately, remember that you are an ambassador for the UK – do not criticise what you cannot change and, above all, keep your sense of humour!

## 8.2 PRACTICALITIES

At the time of writing (June 2019), UK £1 is the equivalent to about 4062 Colombian Pesos.

Please note that the exchange rate may change considerably between now and the start of your placement. You can find bills of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 pesos, and coins of 1 and 2 pesos, and 5, 10, 25 and 50 cents.

The electrical current is 110 Volts and they have the American two-prong types of plugs so make sure that you get proper adapters for any UK appliances you bring. The 110V current means that electrical appliances that do not have dual voltage (110V~220V) will not work. You can check this on the appliance itself.

Colombians use the metric system for weights and measures. Distances are measured in km.

Colombia is 5 hours behind GMT but does not observe daylight saving time which means that an hour must be added to the time difference during UK daylight saving time.

### **Important Numbers:**

Country code 0057

Directory assistance 114

Emergencies 123

## 8.3 CREATING SOCIAL NETWORKS

Even if you have been to Colombia 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 your host institution. 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 university life and gain considerably more from your stay if you become involved in activities organised by the university, such as sports days, theatre, music productions or modern language societies. 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 arrive in Colombia. 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 email addresses or numbers of contacts they made.

Here are some other ways to meet people in Colombia:

- Enrol for an evening class/join a sports club/music group/choir etc
- Volunteer for a charity, society, festival etc
- Join a Facebook group. 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"'

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 Colombia. 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 mentor 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.

## 9.0 TEACHING ENGLISH

### 9.1 ABSENCE FROM WORK

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 host institution immediately by telephone. You may be asked to provide a letter from your doctor. This should cover the entire duration of the absence and must be sent to your institution as soon as it is issued. Any prolonged absence on account of illness should be reported as soon as possible to your host institution, the Ministry of Education, and to the British Council.

Requests for leave of absence for any other reason should be made in advance to your referente who is within their right to refuse it. You are reminded that if you are absent from your institution without prior authorisation, your salary will be discontinued from the first day of your absence.

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

## 9.2 DRESS CODE

Teachers usually dress reasonably informally at schools in Colombia, but you should check with your mentor teacher what the dress code is at your teaching centre. Shorts will likely not be acceptable, but jeans may be.

## 9.3 LINE OF REFERRAL

Conditions in universities in Colombia differ from those in this country. Should any difficulties related to teaching arise, these should be discussed with the teacher of the class concerned in the first instance, or your mentor. If the problem cannot be solved in this way, you should contact British Council Colombia (Please see section 1.2 for contact details). Satisfactory solutions can usually be found through such consultations. The British Council in the UK will be happy to offer advice, but should only be contacted when all other attempts to solve the issue locally have been made. Problems are dealt with most quickly and effectively locally and the British Council will instruct you to take the steps mentioned above. **Please see the provided 'Line of Referral' document for information on who to contact.**

Do tell people if you have problems or if you need information, as otherwise they will assume everything is okay. Your institution 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 Colombia was the best year of their lives. This can raise expectations and often leads to people feeling low, especially during the first few weeks until they settle in.

- 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 social media 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.

## 10.0 TEACHING RESOURCES

### 10.1 BRITISH COUNCIL 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.

- [TeachingEnglish.org](http://TeachingEnglish.org) is an online resource centre produced jointly by the British Council and the BBC:
- The British Council 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.

Some other websites which may be useful are listed below:

- <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk>
- <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org>
- <https://go.edmodo.com/teachers>
- <https://www.teach-this.com>
- <https://en.islcollective.com>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/uk>
- <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJsSEDFFnMFvW9JWU6XUn0Q>

¡Buen viaje!

We hope you enjoy your assistantship in  
Colombia

<https://premierskillsenglish.britishcouncil.org/>

## 10.2 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, postcards, examples of UK coins and notes, train tickets and timetables, stamps, posters and tea towels to decorate walls, 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, simple recipes e.g. scones, recordings of the weather forecast, London tube map, recordings 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 institution 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.

An International Student Card (ISIC) might also be helpful to obtain discounts, for example on public transport and admissions to museums. Information can be found at [www.isic.org](http://www.isic.org)