<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Version 4, 12 August 2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Document compiled by British Council. Information correct at 12 August 2020. We are aware that information changes throughout the year. Please inform us should you discover any errors.
NOTES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS APPOINTED TO BELGIUM IN 2020-2021

This document is the Belgium Country Notes for the 2020/21 English Language Assistants Programme. Any previous country notes relating to previous years should be ignored for the 2020/21 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 changes.

FOREWORD

Congratulations on your recent allocation to a post as an English Language Assistant in Belgium. 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 Belgium. This document should be read carefully, retained for reference and considered in conjunction with any papers issued by our Belgian partners (Wallonie-Bruxelles International) and the Belgian authorities. 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, although it is also available year round on our website.

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. 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
CONTENTS

Foreword.................................................................................................................. 2

1. Co-operating Partners.......................................................................................... 5
  1.1. British Council.................................................................................................. 5
  1.2. Partner organisation in Belgium...................................................................... 5

2. Role of the Language Assistant............................................................................ 6
  2.1. Teaching English.............................................................................................. 6

3. Posting Information............................................................................................. 7
  3.1. School allocation.............................................................................................. 7
  3.2. Dates of appointment....................................................................................... 7
  3.3. Holidays........................................................................................................... 7
  3.4. Staying a consecutive year............................................................................. 7
  3.5. Predecessors.................................................................................................... 7

4. Pre departure information..................................................................................... 8
  4.1. Foreign & Commonwealth Office................................................................... 8
  4.2. Passports and visas....................................................................................... 8
  4.3. Travel to Belgium........................................................................................... 8
  4.4. Taking a car abroad......................................................................................... 9
  4.5. Driving and the law......................................................................................... 9
  4.6. Insurance......................................................................................................... 10
  4.7. Graduates with Student Loans....................................................................... 11
  4.8. Brexit.............................................................................................................. 11

5. Health and wellbeing........................................................................................... 12
  5.1. EHIC Card........................................................................................................ 12
  5.2. Medication....................................................................................................... 12
  5.3. Mental health.................................................................................................. 12

6. Arrival.................................................................................................................. 13
  6.1. Induction meeting............................................................................................ 14

7. Settling in.............................................................................................................. 15
  7.1. Accommodation............................................................................................... 15
  7.2. Residence Permit............................................................................................. 17
  7.3. Creating social networks............................................................................... 17
  7.4. Study opportunities......................................................................................... 18
  7.5. Buying a car in Belgium.................................................................................. 20
  7.6. Settling into school life.................................................................................... 20

8. Money Matters..................................................................................................... 21
  8.1. Monthly allowance......................................................................................... 21
  8.2. Additional income......................................................................................... 21
  8.3. Erasmus+ grants............................................................................................. 21
  8.4. Currency and banks....................................................................................... 22
  8.5. Lost or stolen credit and debit cards.............................................................. 22
  8.6. Income tax...................................................................................................... 22

9. Administrative Matters......................................................................................... 23
10. In country advice .............................................................................................................. 25
   10.1. Personal safety ........................................................................................................... 25
   10.2. Travelling around Belgium......................................................................................... 25
   10.3. Buses and metro ......................................................................................................... 25
   10.4. Trains .......................................................................................................................... 25
   10.5. Car share ..................................................................................................................... 26
   10.6. ISIC cards .................................................................................................................... 26
   10.7. Phoning home, mobiles and internet ......................................................................... 26
11. Teaching tips and resources ............................................................................................ 27
   11.1. Observation period ..................................................................................................... 27
   11.2. British Council teaching resources .......................................................................... 27
   11.3. Teaching materials ..................................................................................................... 27
   11.4. Useful teaching websites and resources .................................................................... 28
   11.5. Book list ...................................................................................................................... 29
12. Spotlight on Belgium ........................................................................................................ 30
   12.1. Regions ....................................................................................................................... 30
   12.2. National holidays ....................................................................................................... 30
   12.3. Emergency services in Belgium ............................................................................... 30
   12.4. British Embassy and Consulate ................................................................................. 30
13. Other information ............................................................................................................. 31
   13.1. Drugs ............................................................................................................................ 31
   13.2. Political demonstrations ............................................................................................. 31
   13.3. Spouses / Partners / Dependents .............................................................................. 31
   13.4. References .................................................................................................................. 31
   13.5. Social media ............................................................................................................... 31
1. 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 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 connecting with and understanding 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. PARTNER ORGANISATION IN BELGIUM

Wallonie-Bruxelles International (WBI) administers the Language Assistants programme in Belgium. They liaise with the schools in Belgium on the British Council’s behalf.

Contact details

WBI (Wallonie-Bruxelles International)
Place Saintelette, 2
1080 Bruxelles.

Tel: +32(0)2 421 84 31
Fax: +32 (0)2 421 87 87
Email: wbi@wbi.be
Web: http://www.wbi.be

Coordinator for British Council ELAs

Rime Mourtada

Email: r.mourtada@wbi.be
2. 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 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 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.

"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." (ELA 2015-16)

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 – see section 11 in this document below.

“Suggest ideas and interesting cultural resources, such as videos/music etc. from your home country. (ELA 2016-17)

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 useful information about teaching English but to get started the following links are useful:

- http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/getting-started-resources
- www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-teens

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


Please be aware that during your period of appointment as a language assistant, it is your school and not the British Council who is your official employer.
3. POSTING INFORMATION

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. Once you receive this information, you should 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 available 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.

3.1. SCHOOL ALLOCATION

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. After contacting your school, if you establish that there is no regular public transport which serves your school(s), and there are no lifts available to your school(s) please inform us of the situation. Please do not contact us without contacting your school first.

3.2. DATES OF APPOINTMENT

The period of appointment for UK assistants in Belgium will be 1st October 2020 – 31st May 2021.

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.

3.3. HOLIDAYS

Assistants are entitled to the usual school holidays. You should be able to obtain the dates from your school’s 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.

3.4. STAYING A CONSECUTIVE YEAR

It is not possible to stay for a consecutive year as a language assistant in Belgium. However, you may wish to consider being a language assistant in another country. You can apply for this through the British Council Language Assistants site. Applications are usually open November to January for the following academic year.

3.5. PREDECESSORS

Due to the newly introduced GDPR laws, the British Council will be unable to automatically share the contact details of assistants appointed to your area in 2019-20. However, in the summer information pack you will find a list of names and contact details of former assistants who have given their permission for their details to be passed on to you.

It should be noted that schools do not necessarily receive assistants each year, but your host school(s) may be in a better position to offer you help with contacting former assistants. We would recommend contacting your host school to ask if they would be willing to ask their former language assistants to share their contact details with you. Past assistants have emphasised how useful it is to contact former assistants in their area and have described their advice as invaluable.
4. PRE DEPARTURE INFORMATION

4.1. FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Before travelling to Belgium you should ensure that you check the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s (FCO) travel advice pages: https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/belgium 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. There is also now a dedicated page for advice concerning the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in Belgium.

We also recommend that assistants read the ‘Advice for Travellers’ documentation provided by the FCO.

4.2. 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 2021. 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: www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/passports

If you have dual nationality (UK/Irish/other EU) you should ensure that your 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.

The rules on travel will stay the same until the transition period ends on 31 December 2020. During this time, you can continue to travel to countries in the Schengen area or elsewhere in the EU with your UK passport.

Assistants from the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are advised to check their passports to ensure that the following statement does not appear: ‘the holder is not entitled to benefit from EU provisions relating to employment or establishment’ as this means you will require a visa in order to work in Belgium.

After the end of the transition period, the rules on travel may change. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) will update their website with details of any changes to the rules as soon as information is available.

We would highly recommend visiting the www.gov.uk website for the most up-to-date official information for British citizens entering, living in and working in Belgium. Pages of particular importance are the Entry Requirements page and the Living in Belgium page.

4.3. 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. 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. The following websites may help you when booking your travel.

- www.skyscanner.net
- www.raileurope.co.uk
- www.directferries.co.uk
- www.eurolines.co.uk
- www.britishairways.com
- www.easyjet.co.uk
- www.flybe.com
- www.tui.co.uk
- www.opodo.co.uk
- www.expedia.co.uk
- www.ryanair.co.uk
- www.interrailnet.com
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.

4.4. TAKING A CAR ABROAD

You will need to research the laws on driving in Belgium, including adapting your head lights for driving on the right. The website www.gov.uk/driving-abroad provides useful information about motoring abroad. You may need extra documents from 1 January 2021 and should stay updated here on any changes.

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 has general information on driving abroad, including the document ‘Motoring Abroad’ 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.

If you require information on driver licensing you can contact Drivers Customer Services (DCS) by email, webchat, phone or by post Correspondence Team DVLA, Swansea SA6 7JL (Tel: 0300 790 6802).

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 https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/driver-and-vehicle-licensing-agency. Until 31 December 2020, UK licences will be recognised in all EU countries plus Switzerland, for as long as they remain valid.

Driving licence rules will stay the same until 31 December 2020.

If you are a resident in Belgium, you should exchange your UK licence for a Belgian driving licence. You can still use your Belgian licence in the UK for short visits or exchange it for a UK licence without taking a test if you return to live in the UK.

For information on driving in Belgium, read the guidance on:

- what you need to drive abroad
- driving license exchange and renewals
- Registering your UK car abroad within 6 months

For information on buying a car in Belgium see 7.7. Buying a car in Belgium below.

4.5. DRIVING AND THE LAW

Alcohol limits: the alcohol limit in Belgium is 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood. Do not drink and drive. Belgian police can breathalyse at random and drivers who test positive face fines up to €11,000. Higher levels carry greater penalties.

Mobile phones: it is illegal to use your mobile phone whilst driving in Belgium. Those in violation of this can face a fine up to €116.
Further advice on driving and the law can be found here:

- [www.rac.co.uk/drive/travel/country/belgium](http://www.rac.co.uk/drive/travel/country/belgium)

4.6. 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.

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, if applicable. Undergraduate assistants should consult with their university to check what cover is provided for them and you 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 make sure that you are covered.

Insurance whilst in post

You must to take out Personal Accident Travel insurance for the period between leaving home and taking up your appointment, the time during your appointment, and also the period between ending your appointment and your return to the UK. This should include the following standard elements of cover:

- Medical costs for treatment in case of illness or accidental injury
- Benefits for permanent disabling injuries, e.g. rehabilitation and living costs
- Benefits for death and costs of repatriation
- Cover for loss or damage to your personal belongings
- Cover for cancelled flights, e.g. if the airline goes out of business or on strike
- Personal Liability cover. This provides legal support and covers financial costs if you cause injury or property damage to others and are found personally liable.
- 24hr emergency assistance helpline.

Many policies also have Legal Expenses cover, which is recommended in case you need legal assistance while overseas.

Personal Accident Travel policies are readily available on price comparison websites, or by using a search engine to search for ‘travel insurance’. The UK Foreign & Commonwealth website offers additional advice on taking out Travel Insurance: [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-insurance](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-insurance).

The British Council will not be responsible for you while you are in Belgium, although we will offer support when necessary and advise you check the Line of Referral document if you have a problem. You are therefore required to take out comprehensive insurance to cover you during your whole time abroad. 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. Please note that it is unlikely that insurance companies will cover you in the event of a natural disaster (referred to as an ‘Act of God’ in insurance policies) or the outbreak of war.

Any package should cover medical expenses, air ambulance, repatriation, personal accident & civil liability, luggage & valuable items, and cancellation in extreme cases. Please note that you should organise your insurance before you leave the UK.

Many insurers are excluding Covid-19 as a cause of travel delay or medical expenses. Please check carefully that your policy does include, as a minimum, medical expenses as a result of Covid-19. Currently, providers such as Endsleigh and Alpha are still providing this cover on their gap year policies, so they may be an option, if the other elements of cover meet your individual needs.

You can also hear more about insurance on our dedicated podcast episode, where we talk about the importance of insurance with a former English language assistant who was involved in a major car crash in Spain, as well as the British Council's Head of Insurance for advice on policies.
Insurance for travel outside of Belgium

Remember that normally your health insurance only covers you within your host country during your allocated time there, therefore if you travel outside the country during or after that period, you may need additional insurance.

Experience from previous language assistants has told us that holiday periods provide the possibility for travel around or outside of Belgium. If you do leave Belgium at any point, it is highly advised to take out insurance for the country / countries that you visit.

4.7. GRADUATES WITH STUDENT LOANS

If you will be overseas for more than 3 months, you will need to 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. You will also 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: www.studentloanrepayment.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=93,6678653&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

4.8. BREXIT

The UK has now left the EU. From the 01 January 2021, the transition period will end. The Government has launched a new website to help businesses, organisations, individuals and families check what they need to do to prepare for the UK leaving the EU.

Language Assistants have a responsibility to keep themselves informed of changes to the Belgian government and UK government’s advice on Brexit and the impact this may have on British nationals living in Belgium.

The government’s website contains specific advice on Living in Belgium. The website contains links to sign up to e-mail alerts on different topics relating to Brexit. We recommend that assistants sign up to these alerts and continue to check the government’s website for any updates.

It is important to note that the government’s website includes the following disclaimer:

Disclaimer - Please note that this information is provided as a guide only. Definitive information should be obtained from the Belgian authorities. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will not be liable for any inaccuracies in this information.

Read the Belgian government’s guidance for UK nationals (in English).

We advise English Language Assistants in Belgium to read advice which may be published on the Belgian government’s website. We also recommend that assistants follow the British Embassy in Belgium on Facebook and Twitter.

The British Embassy in Belgium is holding a series of outreach events across Belgium, to update UK nationals on Brexit. Assistants should consider attending these events to keep informed of changes which may relate to their local areas - British Embassy Citizen Outreach meetings in Belgium.

The Withdrawal Agreement sets out the terms of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU and provides for a deal on citizens’ rights. It sets out a transition period which lasts until 31 December 2020. During this time you can continue to live, work and study in the EU broadly as you did before 31 January 2020.

If you are resident in Belgium at the end of the transition period, you will be covered by the Withdrawal Agreement, and your rights will be protected for as long as you remain resident in Belgium.

Any rights that are not covered by the Withdrawal Agreement will be the subject of future negotiations. Read this guidance page for more information

In the meantime, make sure you are registered as a resident in Belgium (more
details provided below). The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) will update this guidance as soon as more information becomes available.

You should also read the FCO’s guidance on living in Europe.

5. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Please see the Foreign Commonwealth Office website for more information regarding healthcare in Belgium. As a language assistant, you will not be contributing a Belgian healthcare system and must therefore have adequate health insurance in place ahead of your placement.

5.1. EHIC CARD

According to current guidelines on gov.uk Your European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) will be valid up to 31 December 2020.

You should obtain a UK-issued European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). As long as it is valid, the EHIC card will also be useful for any trips to other EU countries. It covers any medical treatment that becomes necessary during your trip, because of either illness or an accident. The card gives you access to state-provided medical treatment only. To apply for a card please use the following link: www.ehic.org.uk. You can also obtain an application form from the post office.

An EHIC is not a replacement for comprehensive travel insurance. It does not cover any private healthcare or costs such as a return flight to your home country or lost / stolen property.

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 for advice. Applicants from Jersey should contact the Employment and Social Security Department for advice.

You should also read guidance on healthcare and studying abroad from the NHS.

5.1. MEDICATION

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 are 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.

“Bring medicines that are hard to get in the place you’re going to (E.g. your specific contraceptive pill, branded things like day nurse / your preferred hay fever tablets - the brands I wanted were unavailable)” (ELA 2014-15)

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.

5.2. 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. It is advised to read this information 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.

- www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health
- www.gov.uk/guidance/foreign-travel-advice-for-people-with-mental-health-issues

The leaflets hyperlinked below contain 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 Checklist

We also have a Podcast episode discussing the importance of Language Assistants looking after their wellbeing.
6. ARRIVAL

6.1. INDUCTION MEETING

At the welcome day you will receive information about Belgium, the school system, eTwinning, the objectives and tasks of an assistant and general advice about the programme. 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
- a brochure containing practical information.

You should keep photocopies of your attestation for your records.

Please note, the British Council has no involvement whatsoever in the organisation of these meetings. The welcome day provides you with useful information about your placement and is a great chance for you to meet other assistants in your region.

The dates for the Welcome Day will be sent to you by WBI directly. Please be aware that this year, the induction meeting may be held virtually.

- Travel:

You should not book travel to Belgium until you have received confirmation from the British Council that your International Child Protection Certificate (ICPC) has been received and approved. Neither the British Council nor the Belgian local authorities can be held responsible for any assistant’s flight cancellation or re-booking costs.

- Programme:

As a general rule you should expect the course to start at 9am on the morning. The subjects covered during the stage will also vary but will probably include talks on the Belgian education system, administrative formalities when living/working in Belgium, teaching English as a foreign language, the local area, and the do’s and don’ts of being an assistant.

Accommodation arrangements permitting, it is sensible to arrive in Belgium a few days before 1st October in order to settle in.

There will also be a ‘debrief’ meeting in November to speak about settling in (administratively and at school), and check if everything is going well.
7. SETTLING IN

“It was quite difficult to integrate at the beginning but if you keep trying it will eventually happen!” (ELA 2016-17)

7.1. ACCOMMODATION

“Always contact your mentor teacher to see if they have any advice before paying deposits/making plans etc., especially before you leave the country. My initial plan was to live elsewhere and commute to work, but I was informed that I’d be able to live on site, with no additional responsibilities, for an unbeatable price.” (ELA 2016-17)

The British Council is not in a position to provide or to help find accommodation. Equally your school(s) 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. Previous assistants are also often able to offer advice on how to find accommodation locally.

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. Remember that you will need your passport to check into hotels/hostels. Do not take out a contract on your accommodation until you know the location of your schools.

We also have a Language Assistants Podcast episode talking with a former English Language Assistant about the different types of accommodation Language Assistants could consider when moving abroad.

“Don't panic if you don't have accommodation before leaving the UK. I was really scared about having nowhere to live when I got to Belgium, but it's definitely easier to stay in an airBnB for a few days to properly visit houses in the country, rather than signing for a house before you've seen it and it being rubbish.” (ELA 2016-17)

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

- search for a room or flat on the internet
- 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 phone 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

• families sometimes advertise for lodgers on noticeboards. If you are interested in this possibility you must clarify whether or not you will be allowed visitors and will be expected to help with housework or children (12-15 hours per week is typical)

Some websites you may find useful are:

Temporary accommodation:  
www.hihostels.com  
www.hostelbookers.com  
www.hostelworld.com  
www.airbnb.com

There is a list of useful accommodation websites in the practical guide that you will receive from WBI at the induction day.

Beware! Some ads in papers do not make it clear if the rental is handled by an individual or an agency. Check when arranging a viewing: otherwise you may have to pay an agency fee which may be the equivalent of one month’s rent.

Landlords may ask for 1 or 2 month’s rent as a deposit (une caution) and 1 month’s rent paid in advance. Always ask (insist if necessary) for a receipt for the money you pay, both deposit and rent. If you do live in privately rented accommodation, check your contract carefully to see how much notice you must give to move out. You may also have to give this notice in writing.

A formal contract to rent an apartment sometimes requires the signature of a garant (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 in your Summer pack. Alternatively, your responsable or a friendly teacher at school might be prepared to ‘take the risk’. It is worth trying to find a Belgian guarantor as a number of landlords are reluctant to accept a guarantor from outside Belgium.

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.

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 consider your safety above all else. 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.

When signing a rental agreement, please be aware of the notice period given. It is recommended to include a ‘diplomatic clause’ in the rental agreement to allow for a shorter notice period in the event that the rental agreement needs to be terminated prematurely due to force majeure (including in the event of a pandemic or a travel warning officially issued by a government). This is advised particularly in the light of the current Covid-19 pandemic.
7.2. RESIDENCE PERMIT

If you are resident in Belgium before the transition period ends on 31 December 2020, you will be able to stay.

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 within 8 day of arriving in Belgium (carte d'immatriculation) at the Bureau des Étrangers 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:

- 4 passport-sized photos
- ID card/passport (originals and copies)
- attestation from the WBI
- contrat de bail or attestation (si chez l’habitant), obtainable from school or landlord as appropriate (this is also necessary to open a bank account)
- fee (price varies for each commune)
- European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

The rules on residency registration remain the same during the transition period. All UK nationals resident in Belgium at the end of the transition period will need to obtain a new residency card that indicates that their rights are covered under the Withdrawal Agreement.

7.3. 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 will have a lot of administrative matters to deal with.

“Get involved in activities in your area. Going to the tourist information centre, looking online, walking around can be great ways to find out what’s going on. Join a choir, orchestra, sports team, boules club, whatever - it may seem daunting but a great way to meet people (even if you don’t see them outside of the context of the activity) and get in some language practice.” (ELA 2016-17).

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

- Live with 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; and
- Volunteer for a charity, society, festival, etc.

Former assistants have recommended that you don’t spend all your free time with other assistants, as you will not 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 for them.

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; however at all times, please follow the advice given in the FCO – Support for British Nationals Abroad document.

• Start at school

The best way to start is with colleagues at school. Make sure that you always seem positive, enthusiastic and willing to learn. Socialise as much as you can with colleagues and
accept all invitations to events, dinners, 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.

“Get to know the teachers in your school(s) as they may offer to show you around a few different places and recommend things to do and places to go wherever you are based.” (ELA 2016-17)

• Previous Assistants
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.

• Languages
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 a lot of people who would love to learn English so the best way to integrate is to arrange Language Exchanges. This can be done by joining groups on Facebook or by asking friends/colleagues if they are aware of anyone who would be interested in an exchange. This way, you learn more about the culture and can seek advice from your language exchange buddy on activities and things to see and do around the city.” (ELA 2016-17)

• ESN
Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is a non-profit international student organisation. Their mission is to represent international students, thus provide opportunities for cultural understanding and self-development under the principle of Students Helping Students. ESN can sometimes assist with finding accommodation in university towns and cities. Assistants completing their third year abroad can often affiliate to local ESN groups and register for an ESN student discount card. Often ESN groups run events and trips throughout the year which provide a great way to meet new people and explore Belgium on a budget.

• Social media
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.

You are welcome to connect with your fellow assistants via Facebook and set up groups to keep in touch and share information. However you must not use British Council’s name in the group name. Any group creators using British Council’s name will be contacted by us and you will be asked to change the name of the group. If you do not do this in a timely fashion, we will have to contact Facebook directly to intervene.

“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!” ELA 2016-17

7.4. STUDY OPPORTUNITIES

If you are appointed near a university 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, telephone (+44) 020 7470 3700. More detailed information can be obtained from the overseas students office of the particular establishment in Belgium.

When enrolling, you should take with you your birth certificate, copies of your qualification 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.

“IT’S DIFFICULT AT THE START IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN A SMALL TOWN WHERE LIFE SEEMS TO BE PUT ON PAUSE AT 19H EACH NIGHT BUT YOU HAVE TO PERSIST AND LOOK FOR ANY WAY YOU CAN TO GET OUT THERE AND MEET PEOPLE.” (ELA 2016-17)

Rural Posts

It should be noted that some posts in Belgium are in rural areas. Past assistants to rural areas have had very positive experiences as they have been able to see “real Belgium”. Sometimes assistants posted to rural locations find it can be more challenging to adapt to, especially at the start, however it can be a very enriching experience on a personal development level and a real immersion in Belgian culture and language. Often assistants in rural postings comment that they receive much more support from their school which can help with setting into life in Belgium.

“It’s difficult at the start if you find yourself in a small town where life seems to be put on pause at 19h each night but you have to persist and look for any way you can to get out there and meet people.” (ELA 2016-17)
7.5. BUYING A CAR IN BELGIUM

When buying a car in Belgium, the seller must provide you with the receipt for original purchase of the car, which details the date of purchase, the names and addresses of previous buyers and sellers of the car, and details of the car (make, model, first date use, etc.). The seller must also give you: a formularie rose, a certificate proving the vehicle has undergone a technical examination within the last two months, a report on the condition of the car, a certificate of conformity and a CarPass.

Once a car is bought, you must register the vehicle to the Direction à l’Immatriculation des Véhicules (DIV). For more information on buying a car in Belgium, you may wish to visit the Belgian Federal Government’s website.

7.6. SETTLING INTO SCHOOL LIFE

Starting any new job can be a daunting experience, no matter how confident a person you are. It’s completely normal to be unsure of where to go, what to do or who to talk to at the beginning.

You will have to make an effort to get to know your colleagues. Showing that you are enthusiastic and keen to get to know staff will go a long way. Start with a simple hello or ask how their weekend went. Learning some simple conversation starters in the target language is always useful. Remember however that you will be working in a school environment therefore staff may not have a lot of free time. Don’t be put off if a teacher doesn’t have time to talk to you in the first instance, they may be in-between or preparing for a class. It doesn’t necessarily mean that they don’t want to talk to you.

“Be enthusiastic, punctual, and make a good impression. Maybe ask teachers for advice/tips etc. to establish trust and better relationships with them, it might be the start of a great friendship.” (ELA 2016-17)

Whilst it’s important to get to know the colleagues you will be directly working with, it’s always useful to get to know other staff too. Try introducing yourself to staff you may not directly work with, for example teachers in other departments, lunch time staff, receptionists, caretakers etc. If there are social occasions or team meetings try to make an effort to attend. It’s a great way to get to know colleagues in a different environment.

Language Assistants that are proactive and take the initiative often settle into school life much faster. Being a self-starter is a great way to make a strong first impression. Teachers are often very busy and will certainly appreciate your efforts to help and try to make an impact.

“Make an effort to speak to the staff you’re working with and get to know them in the staff room. Don’t be put off if it sometimes (or often!) feels like they don’t have time for you. In general they mean well, even if they are busy people and perhaps have their minds occupied by other things. They’ll always appreciate you making an effort.” (ELA 2016-17)
8. MONEY MATTERS

8.1. MONTHLY ALLOWANCE

The net allowance for assistants in 2019-20 in Belgium was approximately €870 net per month. This could vary slightly for 2020-21. No deductions are made.

Reports received from this year’s assistants confirm that it is advisable to have approximately £1,000 available to 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/pre-paid card or ensure that your UK bank account is accessible via cash point outlets in Belgium.

You may wish to consider taking a credit card to cover initial costs. This amount may differ depending on your location and how much rent you are required to pay in advance. Be aware that you are often charged for using your British 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.

8.2. 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 FCO – Support for British Nationals Abroad document). 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. 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. Please ensure that any additional work does not conflict with your school timetable.

8.3. ERASMUS+ GRANTS

Language Assistants who are completing the assistantship as a third year abroad may be entitled to an Erasmus+ Traineeship grant. Individuals can benefit from an exchange abroad with Erasmus+ multiple times, either as a student or as a trainee, but the total time abroad (study abroad periods included) may not exceed 12 months within one cycle of study. An undergraduate degree is considered as one cycle. In some cases, students can go for an Erasmus+ traineeship abroad as a recent graduate. In this case, the traineeship must occur within one year of graduation and individuals must apply while still being enrolled in their higher education institution. It is advised to discuss options with your university Erasmus+ / International coordinator as soon as possible to see if you would be eligible for additional Erasmus+ grant funding as a Language Assistant 2020/21.

Please also note that the British Council is not the employer or traineeship provider of English Language Assistants. This means that we are unable to complete any Erasmus+ related documents and you should not put the British Council as the traineeship provider. You should put the name of your host institution (school) once you receive these details. Our understanding is that there is a one month grace period following the start of your placement in which to submit any Erasmus+ documents, however individual universities and Erasmus+ coordinators will have their own internal deadlines. Please liaise with the Erasmus+ coordinator at your university should you have any questions.
8.5. CURRENCY AND BANKS

You are advised to wait until you arrive in 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.

It is essential that you open a bank account soon after arriving in Belgium in order to receive your payments. Assistants are usually entitled to open a normal compte courant which provides a cheque book and cash card; some banks also offer a ‘young person’s account’ to people under 25 years of age.

When opening an account, you will be required to present the following:

- Passport
- A copy of your attestation
- Your tenancy agreement

Banks in Belgium generally shut at 16:00. Former assistants recommend to also take along your driving licence as identification when opening a bank account.

It is advisable to take with you photocopies of the documents listed above (including the relevant pages of your passport) as these may well be requested.

You are also advised to keep your account open for a month or so after the contract with your school has ended to ensure that all outstanding payments have been received. Please do check on the conditions for transactions relating to your account. For example, it might be that you can only close your account in the same branch in which you opened it.

8.6. LOST OR STOLEN CREDIT AND DEBIT CARDS

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

8.7. 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 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 www.hmrc.gov.uk for information about who to contact.
9. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

9.1. 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 and within 48 hours by telephone. You may be asked to provide a medical certificate from a doctor. It should contain exact dates and cover the entire duration of the absence. This 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 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, 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. Resigning is very much discouraged as it leaves the host school without an assistant for the remainder of the post, and can cause reputational issues for the programme in future years.

9.2. SOLVING PROBLEMS & LINES OF REFERRAL

“When you have a personal problem - be that at work, your health, or problems in the UK - talk to someone as soon as possible, even if it’s not your mentor, speak to any member of staff at the school.” (ELA 2016-17)

Conditions in schools in Belgium differ from those in the UK. 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 WBI (contact details can be found in section 1.2). The British Council in the UK should only be contacted for advice when all other attempts to solve the issue have been made. Problems are dealt with most quickly and effectively locally and British Council will instruct you to take the steps mentioned above.

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 pressures 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 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 fine. The authorities will not be as sympathetic if you suffer in silence and then make a complaint 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.
The assistantship year is a wonderful opportunity to absorb language and culture and gain much in life experience and transferable skills. However it is perfectly understandable that when abroad in a completely different environment there may be times when you feel homesick, have trouble with pupils or colleagues, or with your living situation and so on. However, if you deal with any issues as soon as they arise there should be no reason why your year should not be a great success!

The British Council has a **zero-tolerance policy** approach to discrimination of any kind. If a serious incident occurs and the line of referral is not appropriate, please contact us.
10. IN COUNTRY ADVICE

10.1. 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 FCO – Support for British Nationals Abroad document which provides an emergency telephone number as well as essential guidelines on how to avoid potentially dangerous situations.

We strongly advise 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: www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice.

Ensure that you check regularly the Belgium travel advice page: https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/belgium.

Please also refer to the FCO website for information regarding sexual attacks: www.gov.uk/government/publications/rape-and-sexual-assault-abroad.

10.2. TRAVELLING AROUND

“The 12 hour week is fantastic as you have time to travel and experience the culture.” (ELA 2016-17)

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.

Useful travel websites include:

- www.lonelyplanet.com
- www.roughguides.com
- www.worldtravelguide.net
- www.b-rail.be
- www.wikitravel.org/Belgium

10.3. BUSES AND METRO

Once in Belgium you will find it cheaper for local travel to buy a carnet of 10 tickets or a carte urbaine than to buy one ticket at a time. 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).

10.4. TRAINS

Rail travel is cheaper in Belgium than in the UK. Since Belgium is a small country, distances between towns are short: e.g. Liège-Brussels is 1 hour 20 mins by rail, Tournai-Brussels 1 hour, Nivelles-Brussels ½ an 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. There are numerous offers available, including the Go Pass (10 single rail journeys of any length anywhere in Belgium), so make sure you do your research before you travel. 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 SNCF, and from the ‘Train+Vélo’ leaflets in train stations.

10.5. CAR SHARE

In many areas of Belgium where public transport is less frequent people get around by car share. This website formalises these arrangements and has been recommended by previous assistants: www.fr.blablacar.be.

10.6. ISIC CARDS

International Student Identity Cards cost £12-£15 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 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 (£12-£15), which can be bought in the same way – see 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.

10.7. PHONING HOME, MOBILES AND INTERNET

The Country code for Belgium is +32. Telephone numbers in Belgium have nine or 10 digits. To phone abroad from Belgium the code is 00 followed by the country code. When phoning Belgium from abroad the first 0 of the standard number must be omitted (as when dialing an area code in the UK from abroad).

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 on feedback.

Be aware that calls to the UK from a mobile can be expensive. Previous assistants have recommended using Skype, WhatsApp and Facebook messenger as alternatives.
11. TEACHING TIPS AND RESOURCES

“Always show a willingness to help out the students and the staff when possible. Be patient with any last minute changes and always have something prepared for a plan B.” (ELA 2016-17)

11.1. 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; and
- How the teacher controls disruptive behavior, lateness and lack of effort.

11.2. 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 in delivering 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.be

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. You may also wish to find out if your school has any eTwinning projects or set up a project yourself: https://www.britishcouncil.org/etwinning.

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. Please read this carefully as it is extremely useful in preparing you for your assistantship.

11.3. TEACHING MATERIALS

TeachEnglish 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 website is an excellent free online resource for students of English with lots of games, stories, listening activities and grammar exercises: http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/

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

The British Council is not able to endorse any externally created Facebook pages for English Language Assistants. However you can ‘like’ our British Council Facebook Page, which provides an opportunity to discuss teaching ideas, share your experience with other assistants and find out about other international opportunities through the British Council.

Language Assistants Teaching English Course

This year, we have taken the decision to provide all outgoing English Language Assistants with access to a free teacher training course. Normally participants would be required to pay a fee for access to a different course, however the British Council will cover the costs of this new course. There will be 6 self-access modules which each take a recommended period of 1 week to complete. The modules are as follows:

1. Getting started
2. Child protection
3. Understanding Grammar
4. Understanding Special Educational Needs
5. Understanding grammar teaching – focus on form
6. Engaging with learning technologies – developing reading skills with digital tools

You will be emailed directly and prompted to register for the training course. Although completion of the course is not mandatory, it is highly recommended, and completing the child protection module is mandatory for all allocated English Language Assistants.

You can find out further information on the Language Assistants Teaching English course on our website, under the preparing to teach heading.

Other Teaching Material

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.

11.4 USEFUL TEACHING WEBSITES

- www.englishclub.com
- www.onestopenglish.com
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/teachers
- www.letssingit.com
- www.eslcafe.com
- www.eslpartyland.com
- www.tes.co.uk
- http://projectbritain.com
- http://www.slideshare.net/
- www.eslflashcards.com
- www.bogglesworldesl.com
www.bbc.co.uk You could also listen to our Language Assistants podcast episode centered around Preparing to Teach.

11.5 BOOK LIST

You are not obliged to purchase any materials, however some assistants have commented that some of the books below are useful for English Language Assistants; particularly those who may wish to engage in private tutoring or pursue a career in language teaching in the future. Also look out for the series of handbooks and source books for language teachers published by CUP, Longman, Macmillan and OUP.

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
- 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
- One to One Peter Wilberg Language Teaching Publications
- How to Use the Internet in ELT D. Teeler & P. Gray Longman
12. SPOTLIGHT ON BELGIUM

The Belgian population is now around 11.3 million, with an average population density of 363 people per km². Around 6.5 million people live in the Flemish Region, 3.6 in the Walloon region and 1.2 million people in Bruxelles region. The Euro is the official currency.

Although it is a small country, Belgium’s location has made it an economic and political center in Europe.

Belgium has three official languages: French, German and Dutch (Flemish).

The German-speaking community is mostly concentrated in the east of the Walloon region. The Flemish community is concentrated in the northern Flanders region. French speakers are split between Wallonia and Bruxelles.

12.1. REGIONS AND COMMUNITIES

Belgium is divided into three regions: Wallonia, Flanders and Bruxelles Capital region. Both Wallonia and Flanders are further subdivided into provinces.

There are also three communities: the Dutch speaking, French speaking and German speaking.

The power of the federal government remains, but the communities and regions also have significant power, including establishing and maintaining foreign relations.

12.2. NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

Belgium has many official public holidays every year, some observed nationwide and additional days celebrated in specific regions and communities. In all cases you should check public holidays with your school. The following holidays will be observed in 2020/21:

- 1 Jan: New Year’s Day
- 13 Apr: Easter Monday
- 1 May: Labour Day
- 21 May: Ascension Day
- 1 Jun: Whit Monday
- 21 Jul: National Day
- 15 Aug: Assumption Day
- 1 Nov: All Saints’ Day
- 11 Nov: Remembrance Day
- 25 Dec: Christmas Day

12.3. EMERGENCY SERVICES IN BELGIUM

In any emergency: call 112
Medical assistance: call 100
Police: call 101

General enquiries to the British Embassy:
Tel: +32 2 287 62 11
Fax: +32 2 287 62 50

British Consular Emergency Service for any emergency queries at any time of any day. Leave a message and someone will normally get back to you within one hour of your call.

12.4. BRITISH EMBASSY AND CONSULATE

For up-to-date British Embassy and consulate contact details in Belgium please refer to: www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/find-an-embassy. Please take note of the address of the British Embassy in Belgium below in case of emergency or loss of your passport. Assistants who do not hold British citizenship should check with their own Consulates/Embassies in Belgium.

The British Embassy
Avenue d’Auderghem 10
Oudergemlaan, 1040 Brussels

Tel: +32 2 287 62 11
13. OTHER INFORMATION

13.1. DRUGS

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

13.2. POLITICAL DEMONSTRATIONS

Co-operating partners abroad have requested that the attention of British visitors be drawn to the severe penalties imposed 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.

13.3. SPOUSES / PARTNERS / DEPENDANTS

Assistants 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 period of appointment.

13.4. REFERENCES

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.

13.5. SOCIAL MEDIA

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 behavior. 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.

13.6. USEFUL WEBSITES/INFORMATION

You can read case studies written by former assistants on our website here: https://www.britishcouncil.org/study-work-abroad/outside-uk/english-language-assistants

Other useful websites include:

- www.globalgraduates.com
- www.gov.uk/world/belgium
- www.britishcouncil.be/
- www.google.be/
- www.lecho.be/
- www.lesoir.be/
- www.visitbelgium.com
- www.belgiumtheplaceto.be
- www.bruxelles-j.be

The British Council is the United Kingdom’s international organization for cultural relations and educational opportunities.

Please do not copy, reproduce, edit, adapt, make derivative works of, publish or sell this document or any part of the document without our permission.