



# A NATECLA guide to awarding bodies and ESOL exams

Within England, Northern Ireland and Wales, ESOL Skills for Life (ESOL Sfl) is the main type of public fundable qualifications that are specifically intended for ESOL learners. These qualifications are available at five levels (Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1 and Level 2), are derived from the Adult Literacy Standards for England and align with the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum.

To help you access information about each of the awarding bodies that offer these qualifications we've put together this guide. We also recommend looking at the website of the awarding body/ies you are interested in for the most up to date information. If you are still a little undecided, why not get in touch with some of the awarding bodies directly?

Their approaches to assessment and quality assurance all vary, for example some have externally marked exams whereas others provide internally-marked controlled assessments. The ESOL qualifications listed on these pages consist of three Awards and are structured as follows (**NB:** The structure of qualifications offered by City & Guilds varies – see below):

- Reading – 6 credits
- Writing – 9 credits
- Speaking and Listening – 12 credits
- The full ESOL certificate – 27 credits

## Ascentis

Written with the learner firmly in mind, they have been designed to fit as closely as possible with your teaching.

Tasks within each assessment paper can be taken on separate occasions to suit you and your learners.

Individual speaking, listening and writing tasks can be retaken to recognise your learners' achievements.

Flexibility and choice allows the teacher to assure appropriate assessment for their learners. There is no registration window, learners are registered at any point prior to assessment.



- Reading Online assessments available at all five levels—three live and two practice sets
- Flexible, streamlined, clear assessments and guidance materials
- No assessment windows or minimum registrations
- Task based controlled assessments
- On-demand bank of live assessments, refreshed annually
- Assessment guide times
- Comprehensive Practice Paper bank
- Bespoke staff training, including Regional Quality Meetings, conferences, and other opportunities to network and share best practice
- Subject expert support all year round
- Resources via ESOL Hub on our website to support teaching, learning, and staff training
- ESOL Immersive Learning Resource developed in partnership with Metaverse Learning – free for Ascentis ESOL customers



**[Find out more about the Ascentis qualifications](#)**

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## City & Guilds

City & Guilds has sought to make its ESOL Skills for Life qualifications more flexible and responsive, whilst continuing to base them on the Adult Literacy standards and aligned to the ESOL Core Curriculum.



The suite includes standalone Awards in Reading, Writing and Speaking & Listening, as well as 'full-mode' Certificates that combine all three. Assessments are either centre-assessed or available at as little as an hour's notice. The units on which these qualifications are based are structured differently to those offered by other awarding bodies:

- **Reading:** Entry 1-3 – 9 credits; Level 1-2 – 11 credits
- **Writing:** Entry 1-2 – 9 credits; Entry 3 and Level 1-2 – 11 credits
- **Speaking & Listening:** Entry 1-2 – 11 credits; Entry 3 & Level 1-2 – 12 credits
- Certificate-sized qualifications: Entry 1-2 – 29 credits; Entry 3 – 32 credits; Level 1-2 – 34 credits

 [Find out more about City and Guild's qualifications](#)

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## *Edexcel (Pearson)*

The Pearson Edexcel QCF qualifications in English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) are designed to develop English language skills for the following purposes:



- Language for work so people can access and succeed in employment
- Language for learning to support individuals throughout the curriculum
- Language for life to ensure people have the skills for day to day living

In order to support your centre's delivery of ESOL qualifications, Pearson provide Sample Assessment Materials, Training and access to a Skills Subject Adviser who is available to answer your queries.

 [Find out more about Pearson's qualifications](#)

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## *ESB*

ESB is a specialist Ofqual registered Awarding Organisation with over 70 years of expertise in exclusively awarding



qualifications for English Language and Oracy. It creates, marks, and externally assesses accredited ESOL Skills for Life qualifications, available at five levels from Entry 1 to Level 2, as well as a non-accredited Pre-Entry offering. The organisation currently certifies approximately 16,000 learners per year in a wide range of centres. We are the 'Awarding Organisation of the Year 2023' according to the Federation of Awarding Bodies. ESB is renowned for promoting the power of human connection, self-advocacy, communication, and confidence-building amongst its learners.

- A specialised AO for English Language and Oracy that focuses on a close, supportive and proactive working relationship with its centres. The response time to queries from centres is consistently within 48 hours.
- Assessments can be scheduled at a convenient time, with only 2 days' notice required for reading and writing assessments, and 4 weeks' notice required for speaking and listening assessments. All of these are marked and moderated by ESB.
- ESB follows an external assessment model using highly experienced assessors and markers, including regular training, moderation and standardisation.
- Speaking and Listening assessments can be held at a chosen venue, with friendly assessors who elicit the best from learners, eliminating the need for additional fees for external verifiers and internal quality assurance.
- Results are delivered within 5 days (10 days peak) and certificates within 10 days (99% of the time).
- Personalised reports and feedback are provided for all learners who complete Speaking and Listening assessments and learners who are unsuccessful in Reading or Writing are advised which assessment criteria to work on.

 [Find out more about ESB's qualifications](#)

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## *Gateway Qualifications*

Gateway Qualifications' ESOL offer is based on the Adult Literacy Standards and mapped to the ESOL Core Curriculum:



- learners may take standalone qualifications in Speaking and Listening, Reading or Writing at the level that is most appropriate; or an overarching certificate at one level
- assessment is available on demand through a bank of externally set assessment tasks
- Entry level tasks may be taken on different occasions to fit in with a centre's delivery pattern and teaching schedule
- all entry level assessments and speaking and listening at levels 1 and 2 may be contextualized to meet the needs of different learner groups.

Gateway Qualifications also provides sample assessments, training and access to a subject advisor who can answer your queries.

 [Find out more about Gateway qualifications](#)

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*NOCN*

NOCN pride themselves on their clear and user friendly assessment opportunities, which are supported by a clear and simple marking scheme. They offers on demand paper-based assessments that are accessible just 5 working days after registration. Offering competitively priced and purposeful qualifications which are designed to improve English abilities in English Reading, Writing and Speaking and Listening; they offer standalone components to allow learners to progress at their own pace towards overall certification at Entry 1 through Level 2.



 [Find out more about NOCN's qualifications](#)

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## OCN

OCN London's ESOL qualifications aim to facilitate language development to help people to:

- Gain or progress to meaningful and sustainable employment
- Develop skills to support engagement in daily life activities
- Develop independence
- Build confidence in socialising with others in different contexts
- Access services and benefits



We place authenticity firmly at the heart of our on-demand ESOL assessments, ensuring that we use real language in realistic contexts, so that each task offers a meaningful experience that learners of all ages can connect with and encounter in real life.



[Find out more about OCN London's qualifications](#)

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## Trinity College London

Trinity College London offers externally assessed ESOL Skills for Life exams in 3 modes, as well as pre-entry level ESOL STEP Awards in Speaking and Listening. Trinity assessments provide the quality assurance that comes with working with professional examiners, and ensure that learners are 'on-level' and ready to progress to the next stage of their studies, or into the world of work.



Trinity College London ESOL Skills for Life exams and ESOL Step Awards feature:

- Carefully levelled stepping stones and clear progression routes from ESOL pre-entry level to Level 2
- Authentic, fully communicative Speaking and Listening assessments that are delivered on-demand with a professional examiner
- Relevant and motivating assessment content that reflects real-life experiences and supports the development of communicative and transferable skills for future study and employment

- The convenience and security that you would expect from an external, professional awarding body
- An unrivalled and fully comprehensive bank of free teaching resources for the ESOL classroom including past papers, videos, rationales and the ESOL Activities for Integration
- High-quality, free bespoke training for new and existing exam centres delivered by our professional trainers



**[Find out more about Trinity College London's qualifications](#)**

## Qualification modes offered by each awarding body

Qualification type	Ascentis	City & Guilds	ESB (English Speaking Board)	Gateway Qualifications	NOCN	Pearson	Trinity College London
Full certificate (RQF)	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾
Award in speaking and listening (RQF)	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾
Award in writing (RQF)	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾
Award in reading (RQF)	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾

## Qualification features offered by each awarding body

Qualification type	Ascentis	City & Guilds	ESB (English Speaking Board)	Gateway Qualifications	NOCN	Pearson	Trinity College London
Internally assessed exams	yes ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	no ▾
Externally assessed exams	no ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	no ▾	yes ▾
Free training for IVs	yes ▾	no ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	See below
Continuous support from dedicated EV	yes ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	yes ▾
Video of mock speaking exam available online	yes ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	no ▾	no ▾	yes ▾
Choice of past papers available	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾



online							
Assessments available in smaller chunks	yes ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	no ▾
Resit of part of paper possible	yes ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	no ▾
Tick box paperwork for tutors	yes ▾	no ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	no ▾	no ▾
Audio recording only required for speaking and listening	yes ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	no ▾	no ▾
Video recording required for speaking and listening	no ▾	no ▾	no ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	no ▾
Exams available on demand	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾
Individual feedback on speaking and listening	no ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	no ▾	no ▾	yes ▾

Speaking and listening in pairs	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	One:one available
Speaking and listening in groups	yes ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾
Spiky profile available	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	no ▾
Dictionary allowed for reading exams	no ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	yes ▾	no ▾	no ▾	no ▾

### Further information about ESOL qualification features:

- **Ascentis** – No minimum registrations, no wait or re-registration for resits, listening tasks can be sat as a whole class, certification within 4 weeks, accredited for learners aged 14+, regular free regional support and standardisation events, subject expert external quality assurers
- **City & Guilds** – Additional information is available from the [City & Guilds ESOL Skills for Life \(4692\) website](#)
- **ESB** – All Reading and Writing assessments are marked and moderated externally by ESB. Speaking and Listening exams are assessed at the learners' centres by ESB assessors. Past papers and videos of Speaking and Listening assessments at every level are available on the ESB website.

Exams can be booked 4 weeks before the Speaking and Listening exam date and 2 days before the Reading and Writing exam. Assessment dates are at the centres' convenience. Speaking and Listening results are returned 5 working days from the date of the assessment. Reading and Writing results are returned 5 working days after receipt of papers at ESB or 10 working days in peak periods. Resits can be booked as soon as results are received. Candidates receive a personal Speaking and Listening report highlighting areas of good practice and areas for

development. Speaking and listening assessments are communicative and taken in pairs. Learners may take individual awards at different levels or an overarching certificate covering all three modes. Training is provided at the candidates' centre and ongoing support is available from an ESOL specialist.

- **Gateway Qualifications** - Contextualisation is permitted for Speaking and Listening at all levels, and for Reading and Writing at Entry Levels. Gateway Qualifications has been chosen by the Ministry of Justice as the sole Awarding Organisation for the provision of ESOL for Prison Education.
- **NOCN** - No minimum number of learners required and assessments available 5 days after registration.
- **Pearson** - Spiky profile is available through the individual awards, though not for Certificates.
- **Trinity** - Free training provided for teachers and administrators. Two different speaking and listening components offered: component 1: 1 to 1; component 2: group discussion. **Other key features include:** 100% external assessment; Clear guidance and resources and personal contacts for administrators and teaching staff.

## Registering your ESOL learners

	Ascentis	City & Guilds	ESB (English Speaking Board)	Gateway Qualifica tions	NOCN	Pearson	Trinity College London
Minimum number of learners required for assessments	no ▾	no ▾	no ▾	no ▾	no ▾	depends ▾	no ▾ R & W yes ▾ S & L (2 candidates)

Further information about registration:

- **ESB:** Speaking and listening exams have a minimum fee of £450. No minimum fee for reading and writing. Dates for assessments are fully on demand.
- **Gateway Qualifications:** No minimum number of learners per cohort or per assessment.
- **Pearson:** There is a minimum spend of £1000 per academic year, per centre.
- **Trinity College London:** There is a minimum session fee for face-to-face S/ L exams, and no minimum fee for online centre based S/L exams. Sessions are fully on demand. For R/W there is a minimum session fee with 25 set exam dates, and the option of 3 start times per level on each set date.