



Promoting excellence in TESOL Distance Education Courses

The Accreditation Council for TESOL Distance Education Courses

INFORMATION PACK

Thank you for enquiring about the **Accreditation Council for TESOL Distance Education Courses**.

We enclose some information about the Council and our work which we hope you will find helpful.

This pack contains the following documents:

	<u>Page</u>
1. Getting in Touch	2
2. General Information	3
3. ACTDEC Qualification and Levels Framework	4
4. The ACTDEC Code of Practice	5
5. The Benefits of Using an ACTDEC Provider	7
6. Why Distance Training?	8
7. Choosing a Distance Programme	9
8. Teaching Practice	10
9. ACTDEC Membership and Accreditation	11



Promoting excellence in TESOL Distance Education Courses

Getting in Touch!

By Post 11 Manor Drive
New Haw
Addlestone
KT15 3RJ
UK

E-mail info@ACTDEC.org.uk
Web site www.ACTDEC.org.uk

Key Personnel

Patron Professor Arthur van Essen, OON, MA, MA, PhD

Chair ELT Consultant Ray Parker, MA, B.Phil.Ed(TEFL),
LTCL

**Chair of the ACTDEC
Independent Accreditation &
Audit Panel** Catriona Scott, BA(Hons Classical Studies), Trinity
Licentiate Diploma in TESOL, MEd in TESOL,
PhD in Education

**Deputy Chair of the ACTDEC
Independent Accreditation &
Audit Panel** Maya Briggs, MEd - Masters in Education (TEFL),
RSA DTEFLA



Promoting excellence in TESOL Distance Education Courses

General Information

The ACTDEC symbol of quality



The Accreditation Council for TESOL Distance Education Courses is a non-profit making independent body governed by officers and Council, established to advance professionalism by maintaining and also improving on standards of distance programmes at five levels graded from introductory to advanced. Institutions providing accredited courses are required to adhere to a rigorous code of practice governing areas ranging from publicity to course structure and content, administration, course evaluation and quality assurance. ACTDEC accredited courses are regularly audited to ensure that quality expectations are being met. A copy of the Code of Practice is on page 5.

ACTDEC was founded in 1993 by a small group of TESOL distance education providers concerned by the considerable number of organisations offering dubious and often insubstantial TEFL/TESOL distance-learning courses. ACTDEC's first Chair, and one of its driving forces, was Dr W.R. Lee, founder of IATEFL, who was also responsible for its Code of Practice and accreditation procedures. The courses and qualification levels framework was originally proposed by Monica Vincent of the Overseas Development Authority. The status titles she suggested were subsequently adopted by ACTDEC. In 2013 after agreement by the Council, the ACTDEC levels were revised in an effort to standardise criteria with reference to nationally understood benchmarks. The framework is shown on the next page.

Any reputable TESOL distance learning provider can apply to become an accredited member of ACTDEC. They are then given 12 months in which to apply for formal accreditation. The accreditation panel is completely independent but works to an approved set of syllabus specifications and requirements originally drawn up by Dr W.R. Lee and agreed by accredited member institutions.

Additional Quality Assurance

In some instances 'add-on' programmes (subject to ACTDEC membership agreement) for example grammar, phonetics & phonology and business English have been submitted to the Accreditation Panel for scrutiny, approval and validation.

Accreditation and Validation

We are sometimes asked to clarify the usual distinction made between 'accreditation' and 'validation'.

Accreditation

To give official recognition, certify or guarantee as meeting prescribed standards such as those set out in the ACTDEC Code of Practice and ELT syllabus.

Validation

To give official confirmation of a 'licence' to use a name or title or to confirm, ratify or corroborate usage.

Course Length

The length of an ELT distance course is extremely important and relates to the standing of the award. Programmes of 60 hours or less are simply of an introductory nature. A certificate of educational studies in TESOL is usually 150 hours and a diploma takes 450 hours.



Promoting excellence in TESOL Distance Education Courses

ACTDEC Qualification and Levels Framework

	COURSE	Level	Previously
	70-100 hour Introductory Distance-training Courses leading to the Preliminary Certificate of Educational Studies in TESOL and the qualification Pre-Cert.(ES)TESOL <i>TESOL Assistant</i>	2	1
	120-hour Distance-training Courses leading to the Certificate of Educational Studies in TESOL and the qualification Cert.(ES)TESOL <i>Associate Teacher of ESOL</i>	3	2
	150-hour Distance-training Courses leading to the Certificate of Educational Studies in TESOL and the qualification Cert.(ES)TESOL <i>Associate Teacher of ESOL</i>	4	2
	250-hour Distance-training Courses leading to the Certificate in the Theory and Methodology of TESOL (higher certificate in TESOL) and the qualification Cert.(TM)TESOL <i>Accredited teacher status</i>	5	3
	325-hour Distance <i>plus</i> Residential training Courses leading to the Advanced Certificate in TESOL and the qualification Adv.Cert.TESOL <i>Accredited teacher status</i>	5A	3A
	450-hour Distance-training Courses leading to the Diploma in the Theory and Methodology of TESOL or TESP and the qualification Dip.(TM)TESOL or Dip.(TM)TESP <i>Senior teacher status</i> [Open to candidates who are qualified or experienced teachers with at least two years' full-time teaching experience.]	6	4
	525-hour Distance <i>plus</i> Residential training Courses leading to the Advanced Diploma in TESOL and the qualification Adv.Dip.TESOL <i>Senior teacher status</i> [Open to candidates who are qualified or experienced teachers with at least two years' full-time teaching experience.]	6A	4A



Promoting excellence in TESOL Distance Education Courses

The ACTDEC Code of Practice

1. Publicity, Advertising and Pre-course Information

- advertising and promotional materials give a clear and truthful account of courses offered
- adequate course documentation, describing the goals, scope, nature and procedures of the course, enables participants and other stakeholders to make informed decisions about enrolment or contractual agreements
- before enrolment, participants and/or sponsors are provided with clear details of course fees, including any deposits required, and their rights in the event of cancellation, curtailment or deferment

2. Selection and Admission of Participants

- the course has entry requirements to ensure that participants will be satisfactorily qualified and experienced to benefit from the course and to meet the standards for qualification
- there are effective procedures to assess prior learning and experience in relation to entry requirements
- entry requirements include English language competence where appropriate
- the admissions policy is consistent with equal opportunities statements

3. Statement of Purpose

- the course has a set of goals which serve to guide its content, procedures and evaluation
- the goals relate to an appropriate specified level of achievement
- the goals are consistent with statements about course process and assessment
- the goals of the course are documented and available to participants, teachers, sponsors, administrative staff and other relevant stakeholders

4. Course Process

- teaching and training (both distance or any face-to-face element) is informed by sound, appropriate and up-to-date methodological principles
- a variety of distance teaching-learning methods is experienced by the participants, e.g. print and CD input, reading assignments, action research tasks, activities aimed at developing analytical skills, tutor assessed study file cards, various tutor-assessed activities and assignments, etc.
- there is an appropriate balance of taught input and independent learning
- there is a sensible sequence of learning for a participant throughout the course

5. Course Structure, Syllabus and Content

- the model of course design is consistent with the goals of the course
- the course content is relevant to the future professional aspirations of participants and to knowledge and skills with which they wish to leave the course
- the ACTDEC syllabus requirements are satisfactorily covered
- decisions about course study hours, workloads, etc. are consistent with the course syllabus, objectives and the needs of participants and sponsors
- the various components of the course fit together for the participant to provide a coherent and balanced programme
- the course facilitates a manageable level and pace of learning in the participants



Promoting excellence in TESOL Distance Education Courses

6. Progress and Assessment

- there are procedures through which participants get regular feedback throughout the course about their progress
- participants are assisted in improving their strategies for learning and the quality of their work, e.g. through telephone tutorials, recorded feedback on CD, e-mailing, independent learning syndicates
- a system for valid and reliable assessment is specified, maintained and reviewed periodically in line with changing goals and course design
- assessment procedures are consistent with the goals of the course
- a range of assessment methods is used
- coursework and examination are linked and sequenced clearly for the participants
- there is an effective appeals procedure for candidates who dispute assessments or examination results
- participants' achievements are recognised through certification

7. Course Administration

- there are satisfactory structures and procedures to deal with course recruitment, admissions, monitoring of progress and assessment, and grievance
- clear and effective two-way lines of communication exist between course administration and participants
- effective lines of communication exist between members of the staff team and distance tutors
- accurate records are maintained of participants' progress, assessment and achievement and available to relevant stakeholders
- certification of various kinds is provided for participants

8. Staffing

- all staff members have appropriate qualifications and experience
- staff resources are sufficient to deliver the course effectively
- conditions of service for staff are fair, respect local labour agreements, include grievance and disciplinary procedures and encourage motivation, continuity and teaching effectiveness
- sufficient time is allowed for course tutoring and academic management of the course
- there is adequate provision for staff development
- staff experience and expertise is engaged in decision making processes about course structure and procedures
- there are appropriate procedures for the induction and training of new distance tutors and staff members

9. Facilities and Resources for Teaching and Learning

- resource needs are identified in relation to the purpose, type and fees for the course and a range and quality of distance resources are made available & all resources offered and advertised are made available

10. Communication with Sponsors

- the sponsoring body is given detailed information about the course of study, the fees and any additional costs, the assessment system and the reporting procedures to the sponsor
- the institution provides progress and final reports as and when appropriate
- sponsors are advised of any necessary or desirable changes to the course and there is relevant discussion
- where appropriate, sponsors are involved in consultation and negotiation of course structure, content and procedures



Promoting excellence in TESOL Distance Education Courses

11. Welfare (in the case of residential/face-to-face components)

- arrangements are made to provide adequate support on academic and personal matters
- participants are given access to institutional services for health, accommodation, welfare, etc. and/or information/ access to such services in the community
- participants are assisted with legal matters to do with visas, police registration, etc.

12. Course Evaluation and Quality Assurance

- there are procedures to monitor and maintain internal standards on each delivery of the course
- an experienced and recognised external professional is involved in monitoring participant performance on each delivery of the course
- where the course is repeatedly offered, mechanisms are in place for periodic review of the course in response to changes in participant needs, trends in teacher education and changing professional contexts
- periodic course review takes account of formative and summative evaluation data available from several previous courses
- a range of appropriate procedures are used in course evaluation and periodic review of the course
- relevant stakeholders, e.g. participants, staff, sponsors are involved in both course evaluation and periodic review

The Benefits of Using a TEFL/TESOL Distance Provider Accredited by ACTDEC

Standards are essential in the training of teachers of English to speakers of other languages. This is especially true in the case of free-standing TESOL distance programmes. Accreditation costs money but for all accredited members the cost is a worthwhile investment. From the consumer's standpoint, knowing that the accredited course being offered is professionally sound and may be favourably compared with similar courses, at the same level, is important.

- Through rigorous initial accreditation, followed by regular inspection and monitoring, ACTDEC is able to provide quality assurance for members of the public looking for a TESOL distance course.
- Trainees following an ACTDEC accredited course can be sure of academic quality assurance, quality assessment procedures and good service; they will also know that the qualification the course leads to is a professional qualification widely known and respected.
- ELT schools and institutions worldwide are able to contact ACTDEC through its website, by telephone or e-mail to check the standing of qualifications.
- The same syllabus content, at each level, is covered by all ACTDEC accredited providers though course methodology, approach and delivery may differ.
- All aspects of provision are rigorously assessed and measured against the relevant regulatory standards and ELT syllabus levels.

Non-accredited providers offer no such safeguard.



Promoting excellence in TESOL Distance Education Courses

Why Distance Training? What are the Advantages?

Some people might perhaps imagine that a distance course is, in some way, inferior to a presence-taught course but this is most definitely not the case. Distance learning can prove extremely advantageous. There are many reasons for choosing a distance programme but for the moment consider the following six advantages.

- The opportunity to follow a very substantial course of professional training at a fee much lower than would normally be the case.
- The possibility to work from home at one's own pace during the course. This is particularly useful for those teachers in employment who seek a course of professional enrichment but cannot afford a period away from their regular employment.
- Adequate time to fully cover and, importantly, absorb the wide range of material essential to a quality course of professional training.
- The very considerable saving, in terms of both time and money, as a result of not having to travel to a place of study and not having to meet the residential costs often involved.
- Confidence, through the acquisition of substantial subject knowledge, prior to any teaching practice element.
- One is usually able to start a distance course whenever one wishes. One begins as soon as one enrolls and one should, within reason, be able to take as long as one needs.

Distance Learning a First Choice

Distance learning is not necessarily a second choice for students who cannot attend a conventional course, or who cannot afford the fees. Nowadays, more and more distance-learning students follow this route deliberately, as a first choice! This is in addition to people who follow the route for more obvious reasons: they cannot attend residential courses because of work or family commitments, or because they are remote from any institution offering a face-to-face programme. It is important to stress that distance-training is a real way ahead, with advantages of its own, and a viable alternative to face-to-face training.

Distance students are not looking for some 'second best' or concessionary qualification. Most want a qualification as worth-while as those obtained by people who have studied in a more conventional way. This is why many hundreds of students successfully follow an ACTDEC accredited course each year.



Promoting excellence in TESOL Distance Education Courses

Choosing a Distance Programme

A large number of TEFL/TESOL distance providers exist. Some are perhaps good providers; some courses seem to be very reasonably priced and may even sound impressive. Remember however, you usually get what you pay for. Try to compare course fees whether four-week face-to-face courses, free-standing distance only programmes or hybrids (distance-training followed by a residential element including teaching practice). Distance only programmes will usually cost less than full-time face-to-face tuition or hybrids, but it's worth remembering that a really first class professional, interactive distance programme is expensive to produce and administer effectively. The various forms of study, whether at introductory or diploma level, which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors with their students in lecture rooms nevertheless benefit from the careful planning, guidance and tuition of a really sound professional institution.

When selecting a distance-training programme invest wisely. Above all, and most importantly, choose a course formally validated by a recognised independent external examining body or one accredited by ACTDEC based on a published ELT syllabus that can be compared on a like-for-like basis with others. Really first class providers take pride in their provision and prove it with accreditation.

A major problem with many TEFL/TESOL distance providers is one of course and qualification level. Far too often a so called diploma course will only equate to the certificate level of a reputable course provider. The [ACTDEC framework](#) provides a sound bench mark for level appropriacy. If in doubt ask the course provider you are thinking of buying from for a syllabus, check the syllabus content and the number of study hours involved or seek unbiased professional advice. Price is often a clue to quality. Something that seems to be too good to be true, very often is.

If possible check any claims made by the provider before you enrol. Since these providers are not accredited by any recognised professional body some resort to the publication of long lists of supposedly 'satisfied clients'. There is however no substitute for the regular professional scrutiny of an external accreditation body or recognised independent examining board. Clever wording and an impressive looking list of academic staff should sound a warning bell!

ACTDEC receives a number of complaints about non-accredited providers, usually after the event, when they have purchased the course, completed it and received their certificate or diploma. Only then do they discover it is simply not recognised and of little value. The usual cry is — What can I do? Sadly the answer is nothing since by then it's too late.

Distance-learning in the field of TEFL/TESOL can be something of a minefield. Invest your money wisely and choose a course that is properly validated or accredited. The following are recognised TESOL/TEFL validating bodies.

ACTDEC - The Accreditation Council for TESOL Distance Education Courses
The College of Teachers, Cambridge/RSA, Trinity College London
United Kingdom Colleges of Higher Education and Universities



Promoting excellence in TESOL Distance Education Courses

Teaching Practice

Many new entrants to the TESOL profession experience real difficulty in funding a course which includes six hours of observed and assessed teaching practice. One result is that a considerable number of new entrants to the profession complete a **distance only** programme and simply head abroad in search of a teaching post.

There is of course, no substitute for teaching practice. In the case of experienced practising teachers it is not always necessary though there is little doubt that they too would benefit from a professional course that includes observed and assessed ESOL teaching practice.

However, ACTDEC — the Accreditation Council for TESOL Distance Education Courses — firmly believes there is no reason why teaching practice should not follow distance-training; quite the opposite!

For anyone without teaching experience it is now possible to undertake a two month teaching practice development practicum where, through the completion of a **Teaching Practice Portfolio** maintained by the participant and the sponsoring institution, teaching experience is recognised and rewarded.

This scheme makes it possible for teachers with Associate or Accredited Teacher status to obtain an ACTDEC Certificate of **Teaching Practice Development** at the end of the two month development practicum.

The Portfolio Scheme may be full or part time. The requirements for successful completion of the supervised teaching practice and award of the certificate include the **observation of eight lessons** given by experienced teachers with candidate observation tasks assessed by a moderator.

The completion of **six unobserved lessons** each with a reflective lesson appraisal (self report feedback forms) which are externally assessed.

Four lessons observed by the institution's teaching practice supervisor. These are followed by four recordings of feedback sessions with the supervisor. **Six further lessons observed** and graded by the institution's practicum supervising teacher, four of which are subject to self-report form completion.

Submission of a piece of writing (500 words minimum) reflecting on the affect the procedure has had on the development of the participant.

In addition the candidate will have completed a teaching practice portfolio folder containing documents relating to the above.

Distance-trained teachers having successfully completed a level 3, 4 or 5 programme will have a greater opportunity of finding a suitable sponsoring institution for teaching practice if they themselves do the searching locally or in the area where they wish to find employment.



Promoting excellence in TESOL Distance Education Courses

ACTDEC Membership and Accreditation

A two-tier ACTDEC membership scheme is open to reputable teacher-training institutions offering free-standing (or hybrid / blended) TESOL distance-training programmes.

1. Non-accredited members agreeing to abide by the ACTDEC code of practice have twelve months in which to achieve ACTDEC accreditation for a specified distance-training course (or courses) at one or more of the five ACTDEC levels.
2. Application for membership of ACTDEC registers intent on the part of the institution, to seek accreditation for a specific course (or courses) and, by implication, signals a willingness on the part of the institution to adhere to the high standards set out in the code of practice.
3. Members with courses that have been accredited are eligible to display the ACTDEC symbol of quality assurance and statement with regard to each specifically accredited course, e.g. course level 2 or course level 5, etc. Please see symbols below:



ACTDEC Accreditation Panel

The Accreditation Panel is appointed by Council. Panel members are independent, appropriately qualified with experience and expertise in the field of TESOL distance learning and training.

The Panel normally works in sub-panels of two who inspect documentary submissions made by institutions applying for accreditation and completes an accreditation report for each course included in the submission. **Advice, help and guidance is always available to distance providers seeking accreditation.**