



Case Study: Higher ESOL allows Alice Keung to resume her career in architecture

Alice Keung worked for many years as an architect in her home city of Hong Kong, but when she arrived in Scotland in July 2005 she found that she could not communicate or understand enough of what was said around her. That's why she enrolled on the SQA Higher Course in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

She achieved Higher ESOL at grade A, and quickly progressed to finding work as an Architect's Assistant in Glasgow. Read on to learn more about Alice's story.

The issues and challenges Alice faced

In Hong Kong Alice Keung gained a Masters degree in Architecture, and then practised as an architect for a number of years before moving to Scotland in 2005.

Her native language is Cantonese. Although English is her second language, her ability and confidence in speaking and listening in English was limited. She found it particularly difficult to pronounce and recognise certain sounds that are not used in her native language. Alice decided it would be best to improve her English before looking for work.

Alice enrolls on a Higher ESOL Course

Alice contacted Glasgow Metropolitan College and started the Higher ESOL Course. She found that living in the country of the language she was studying made the Course very rewarding, 'As I am living in an English-speaking country, I can learn every day and everywhere', she says.

And it's not a daunting course of study and assessment, either. Her impression — 'The mixture of internal assessment and the final exam at the end of the Course meant that the overall result was not determined by one big exam. Lots of small tests give a truer reflection of the standard of the learner'.

During the Course, Alice was able to familiarise herself once more with the everyday skills of an architect, such as giving presentations and writing reports. She was also able to improve on her reading and writing skills. In her Everyday Communication Speaking assessment, Alice gave a PowerPoint presentation on the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's campaign to improve school dinners.

Studying at Glasgow Metropolitan College also gave her the chance to meet new people and make friends. This meant more opportunities to practise her spoken English and to become familiar with different accents.

Alice now

Under the Royal Institute of British Architects regulations, Alice cannot use the title of 'Architect' in the UK until she passes the professional practice exam. However, the Higher ESOL qualification and her professional experience in Hong Kong allowed her to secure her first job in the UK as an Architect's Assistant.

The Higher ESOL Course has improved Alice's English speaking and listening skills, and given her the confidence to accompany her boss to meet with clients to discuss drawings and projects. Alice takes minutes of the meetings, and adds very detailed specifications/notes in her drawings to make them as clear as possible.

'In architecture you communicate with drawings,' Alice says, 'but you still have to explain them.' The ESOL Course has been a real step in the right direction, she concludes. 'It will take time to get used to the regulations and working practices in Scotland. I know I can do more, but in a different culture and language it is difficult. At least I am now on the career path I want to be on.'

For further information on ESOL call SQA's Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000 or visit www.sqa.org.uk/esol