



## Case Study: Higher ESOL lets Sonia progress to university to study Biomedical Sciences

Sonia Mustafa arrived in Scotland aged 15 and started school in S4. Although she had studied English at school in her native Pakistan, she found it very difficult to communicate in English or understand what was being said around her. By S6 Sonia had overcome all difficulties and had achieved five SQA Highers, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and won a place at Strathclyde University to study a BSc in Biomedical Sciences. Read on to find out more about Sonia's remarkable achievements.

### Sonia faces a daunting challenge

When Sonia arrived in Scotland from Pakistan she was nearly 16. She started school life in St Roch's Secondary in Glasgow mid-way through S4.

Sonia had been in the top set of her English class in Pakistan, but when she arrived in Scotland she could barely understand the English spoken here, and lacked confidence in her speaking. Many of her classmates were under the mistaken impression that Sonia was very shy!

It was a daunting challenge as Sonia was immediately faced with the challenge of coping with Standard Grade exams. She managed very well and achieved Credit level in Mathematics, Biology and Chemistry and General level in English and Geography.

### Higher ESOL helps Sonia with her studies

Although Sonia did very well to achieve a Standard Grade at General level in English, her teacher at St Roch's, Mairi Howard, believed that the cultural content and the demands of literary analysis in Higher English would prevent Sonia from achieving the language qualification that matched her intellectual level. She believed that Higher ESOL would be more appropriate for her — it would improve her everyday and academic English and enable her to progress to university.

‘The ESOL Course enables bilingual pupils working at Higher level in other subjects to improve all aspects of their English language skills,’ explained Mairi, ‘and to achieve an appropriate SQA qualification in English. It is wonderful to be able to offer ESOL Courses and qualifications that are specifically designed for EAL (English as an Additional Language) pupils and allow them to achieve their potential’.

Sonia’s own impression is equally good. ‘I found the Course very useful,’ she said. ‘I learned how to give presentations, and this has really helped me with presentations in tutorials at university.’ She has also found that practice in report-writing has stood her in good stead with tutorial assessments and reports.

In S5 and S6 Sonia passed five Highers, including Higher ESOL at grade A, and two Intermediate 2s — a fantastic achievement for a student who arrived halfway through S4. Sonia even found time to be a prefect in S6, and to work with Save the Children to co-produce a DVD highlighting the plight of minors at UK Detention Centres for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

### **Sonia’s plans for the future**

All Sonia’s hard work paid off when she won a place at Strathclyde University to study a BSc in Biomedical Sciences, making her one of the first students in Scotland to pass Higher ESOL and progress to university. But that’s far from the end of the story. ‘My next goal is to study medicine and become a surgeon,’ Sonia says.

For further information on ESOL call SQA’s Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000 or visit [www.sqa.org.uk/esol](http://www.sqa.org.uk/esol)