

# British Council in Hong Kong

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## FAQs – English Language Learning

### **Why did you move your English classes online?**

At the British Council, the health, safety and well-being of our customers, staff and the community in which we operate is our top priority.

In line with Hong Kong government recommendations to limit the spread of Covid-19, in February 2020 we suspended our in-centre English classes for kindergarten, primary and secondary across all our Hong Kong centres. When the government introduced the restrictions on social distancing and group gatherings in March, we also suspended our adult classes. To ensure that as many of our students as possible could continue with their English language learning during this difficult time, we immediately set about moving a number of our courses online.

We are constantly reviewing our operations in light of government and other advice and adapting them accordingly.

### **What alternatives are you offering to in-centre classes?**

We are currently offering a combination of immersive online classes in smaller groups, complemented by interactive, guided learning offline. This enables students to continue with their learning, have a sense of routine, make the same progress, with the same materials and teachers (where possible) during this time of unprecedented disruption.

We are currently delivering online learning across phonics, primary, secondary and adult learners. Due to the specific learning needs of kindergarten students, we have decided that it will not be possible to offer some of our classes for this very young group online. We are therefore discussing with parents their preferred alternatives at this time and until we can resume in-centre classes, which we hope will be soon.

### **What does your online learning entail?**

It differs for each learner group. For example, for our Secondary Plus Online course, we have adapted all the great content and expertise from our in-centre classes to create an engaging and interactive online learning experience with the same experienced teacher (where possible) and other students who have the same language level and are of a similar age. Each experience includes a live lesson with self-access learning before and after the class to help

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students prepare in advance and also continue with their learning between sessions. Added benefits of the online classes are: smaller class sizes; individual e-portfolios for projects; a personal dashboard where both the student and parent can see what progress has been made; and, access to a wide range of extra resources, e.g. helpful grammar and vocabulary activities.

For more information on our online offers, please click the links below:

[Primary Plus](#)

[Secondary Plus](#)

[Adults](#)

## **How many people have taken up online learning?**

An average of 65 per cent of our students across various life stages who are eligible for online learning have taken up online courses so far.

## **Are the online classes the same duration of time as in-centre classes?**

The overall learning time of both online and in-centre learning is the same, as are the learning outcomes, although the live interaction with teachers in some of our online courses may be shorter than in the classroom. In addition, the class sizes online are significantly smaller, to maximise students' interaction with teachers and classmates for that intense period of time.

For example, for Primary Plus, one lesson in-centre is 1.5 hours; an online lesson is 45 minutes of live interaction with the teacher and 45 minutes of guided learning beyond the live class. Maximum capacity for P3-6 is 20 students for in-centre classes, online it is 10 students per class.

The 90 minutes of learning consists of:

- pre-lesson self-study materials with a focus on vocabulary and grammar
- a 45-minute live class, where students can communicate and collaborate with their teacher and fellow students and get feedback on the guided learning activities
- homework / project work for students to consolidate their learning after the class.

## **How can I ensure my child's security online?**

At the British Council, we are trusted by parents the world over not only for our expertise in teaching English, but for our high levels of child protection and safeguarding. We take this very seriously. With this in mind, we have put in place robust measures to ensure children's safety during online learning and that their privacy and data is protected. Please contact us directly if you could like a copy of our policy.

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## **How are you dealing with technical issues?**

We started trialling our online learning two weeks after the Hong Kong government announced the school closure in February. A lot of thought, expertise, hard work, testing and feedback has gone into developing our online offers since then and we are still improving, updating and maintaining our platforms every day. Although we inevitably experienced a few technical problems at the beginning, with customer feedback, we have been able to deal with them successfully.

A special team has also been set up to help students with technical difficulties while they are joining or participating in the online lessons. If students encounter any difficulties at the time, they can let us know by sending us a short text message to a dedicated WhatsApp line. One of our team members will call the students back as soon as possible to resolve the issue.

## **What if I do not want to take up the online offer for myself or my child?**

We will work with parents and children to find the best solution for you in this unprecedented situation. If you do not want to take up the online classes, you can take a credit to postpone your participation until our in-centre classes resume. In certain circumstances, we can also offer a refund.

## **I made an enquiry, but no one has got back to me yet. Why not?**

At the British Council in Hong Kong, we have around 9,000 unique students studying with us each year and thousands more taking examinations. In the face of Covid-19, we have had an unprecedented number of enquiries to our hotline, by email and through our social media platforms. Every person's situation is unique, and therefore we have to deal with all enquiries personally and individually. We prefer to call customers back than resolve these issues by email or social media, and this takes time.

We are currently making our way through a large volume of enquiries and will do our best to call people back within two working days of their initial enquiry, if they provide us with their contact details to follow-up. Resolving the enquiry fully may of course take more time. We ask you to please have patience with us as we do this.

Covid-19 has taken us all somewhat by surprise in its scale and impact and there is no way any of us could be completely prepared to respond. There is a lot we can learn from this experience for the future.

## **What is your policy on offering credits and refunds?**

The usual terms of our contract state that: 'No refund, make-up class, or alternative compensation will be given for class cancellations due to circumstances beyond the control of the British Council. This includes, but is not limited to outbreak of riot, civil commotion, epidemics, natural disasters...'

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However, due to the unique and unprecedented nature of Covid-19 and our commitment to best serve our customers, we are in this instance offering alternatives in the form of online learning, credits for future in-centre classes or, in some circumstances, refunds.

### **When will you resume in-centre teaching?**

While our buildings remain closed to the general public, with the agreement of the Hong Kong government we have resumed some small-scale adult teaching in our Admiralty and TST centres since 11 May.

Now that the government has announced that Hong Kong schools will start a phased return from the end of May, we will start planning for a managed resumption of our other in-centre classes and update you as soon as we have our timetable confirmed.

With this in mind, we have consulted a number of parents by telephone and we ask that all parents please read and complete the survey we have emailed so that we can better plan the return to in-centre classes.

We will proceed however with the highest levels of hygiene and other precautionary measures in place, like temperature-checking and health and travel declaration forms.

### **Will you continue with online teaching when you reopen your centres?**

Now that the Hong Kong government has announced that schools will start a phased return from the end of May, we will start planning for a managed return of our own in-centre classes. Given what we have learned and the feedback from our students during this intense period of online learning and teaching, we are looking at how best we can integrate this knowledge and experience to complement our in-centre classes in the future.

For example, we have already developed a blended online and in-centre offer as part of our myClass course for adults, which you can read about [here](#).

Please be assured that the role of the teacher will always be central to all of our learning experiences.

### **Who should I contact with further questions?**

If your enquiry is not urgent, for English courses, please email us at [enquiries@britishcouncil.org.hk](mailto:enquiries@britishcouncil.org.hk). For exams, [examinations@britishcouncil.org.hk](mailto:examinations@britishcouncil.org.hk). Or you can call us on +852 2913 5100. As we are currently receiving a very large number of enquiries, our response time may be delayed. If you need a more immediate response, please provide us with your full name and phone number in your message.

If you have questions relating to our other areas of British Council work during Covid-19, please check out the following resources:



**For general information on our British Council in Hong Kong operations under Covid-19, visit:**

[www.britishcouncil.hk/en/covid-19](http://www.britishcouncil.hk/en/covid-19)

**For Exams:**

[www.britishcouncil.hk/en/exam/covid-19-updates](http://www.britishcouncil.hk/en/exam/covid-19-updates)

**For Study UK:**

<https://study-uk.britishcouncil.org/moving-uk/coronavirus>

We thank you for your continued support and understanding at this difficult time and we look forward to welcoming you back at our centres in the near future.

The British Council in Hong Kong.