The question of credentials looms ever larger in today's rapidly changing Japanese university environment. Which degree is the most relevant and how is it to be obtained? This article provides a guide to one particular form of qualification, the master's degree in TESOL, concentrating on those offered by distance learning from British universities.

The changes initiated earlier in this decade by the Ministry of Education are steadily filtering through the system. These changes are having a significant effect on recruitment patterns. As Oda (1995) points out, an inexorable process of reorganization is under way, affecting both the proportion of full-time to part-time teachers, and the skills required of all teachers.

Credentials are only part of the recruitment story: Chenoweth and Pearson (1992) note that personal contacts are important because institutions normally recruit candidates through recommendations from the current staff. Publications, the status of one's present post (Oda 1995), and experience, both of teaching the age group and of living in Japan, are important as well.

Although only a part, credentials are nonetheless an essential part of one's appeal. A master's degree is basic, both as a Ministry of Education requirement for teachers in recognized universities and colleges and as a market necessity. Moreover, the degree must now be a relevant one. As recently as 1992, Chenoweth and Pearson commented, "The degree need not be in a field related to English teaching, *while* adding, "a degree in TESOL is advantageous" (p. 4). Today, it is not advantageous but essential. Of fourteen full-time university posts advertised in TLT in 1995 (Vol. 19, nos. 5, 6, 8) eleven stipulated a master's degree in TESOL; the other three demanded a doctorate.

For most people, professional advancement is the principal motivation for pursuing a TESOL master's degree: either to move from language school to part-time university work, or from a part-time to a full-time university post. Or, full-time teachers with credentials in other fields may want to increase their chances of promotion. A master's degree is also worth pursuing for its intrinsic value. Many teachers, such as the readers of this journal, are interested in both improving their day-to-day skills and in deepening their knowledge of areas relevant to their work.

**Distance Learning**

Why do some teachers consider distance learning (DL) courses? For many foreign language teachers, a one or two-year full-time course in their home country is impossible because of contractual obligations, family considerations or financial constraints. The alternative of studying part-time at a branch center of an American university in Tokyo or Osaka (see Vierra, 1994) has the appeal of face-to-face contact with teachers and fellow students. These courses have been running for a number of years and their students also benefit from the large networks of graduates, teachers and their contacts throughout Japan -- networks which can greatly assist the job-seeker. However, this option is demanding both physically and financially because of the travel involved. Also, many full-time teachers simply cannot set aside the necessary blocks of time.

Compared with both full-time education abroad and part-time study in Japan, the DL option has pedagogical as well as logistical advantages. To some extent, learning can be tailored to the individual's pace and preferences, and students can draw on their immediate experiences, relating theory to practice. More practically, it is the only way some people living in remote locations can study, and DL courses are relatively inexpensive. For example, the Columbia University Teachers' College MA course offered in Tokyo costs ¥2,200,000, and the similar Temple University MEd ¥1,705,750, while the fees for the DL courses surveyed here range between ¥500,000 and ¥1,200,000.

**British Distance Learning Courses**

Of the dozen or so DL master's degrees in TESOL offered internationally, about half are from British universities. (See Appendix 2 for other examples.) The British courses are surveyed here because they are fairly similar and thus readily comparable.

British universities preponderate in part because DL has been widely developed in Britain for a variety of subjects at degree level, especially since the founding of the Open University in the 1960s. The Open University is public and fully accredited, offering degrees for students who are otherwise unable to attend university. It furnishes teaching material in print, and also on public television. Local support is provided through a network of tutors, and students are required to attend short summer courses. The distance learning TESOL courses draw on this body of expertise.

The main features of the five British DL courses can be seen in the summary chart (Appendix 1). Courses are offered by Aston, Sheffield, Surrey, and Birmingham Universities, and by the Moray House Institute of Education at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. These universities are all public, have a history of distance education, and are accredited in the same way as those gained by full-time study on campus. More detailed information may be obtained directly from the university administrators.

Outside Britain, however, DL courses have a credibility problem at the moment. It must be acknowledged that among both teachers and students involved in full-time education there is a widespread distrust of off-campus learning. Peter Garlid, a Nanzan Junior College administrator involved in recruitment remarked, "A lot of Japanese staff believe that a resident program is really important" (personal communication, August 25, 1996). This is partly because very few current teachers have studied by DL. It is also due to the number of mail-order diploma mills offering spurious degrees (see Bear, 1995). At first glance, the advertisements for these bogus universities resemble those for legitimate courses, with impressive coats of arms, and seductive titles such as "Knightsbridge University." However, on closer inspection their unofficial status is easily grasped: they offer "credits for life and work experience," and operate from suspicious addresses. For example, no normal British university operates from a P.O. box number as does "Fairfax University" in Peterborough, or is part of a limited company as in "Knightsbridge University" in Torquay. As a result, their degrees are deservedly regarded as signs of gullibility -- rather than of learning.

Of course problems of academic integrity, for example plagiarism or examination security, afflict all university courses, on or off campus. The universities offering DL courses discussed here should not, however, be confused with these transparently fake operations. Indeed, these DL courses are subject to the same accreditation procedure as all other courses offered by British universities. The universities must gain the approval of the U.K. Ministry of Education before running their courses.

The real market value of a course is generated by the performance of its graduates. The courses offered by Columbia and Temple in Japan have developed a solid reputation because their graduates have proved their worth both as teachers and as researchers. But these DL courses started in the 1990s, and thus are only just beginning to establish their reputations and graduate networks.

**Course Structures**

The British DL courses provide the background needed for teaching English to speakers of other languages, with a variety of emphases among the courses. For example, the Aston course prospectus emphasizes that it is a theoretical course: "This is an advanced academic course, not teacher training" (1995, p.1). The Surrey prospectus, on the other hand, states that "the course is relevant to practical teaching which goes on in the classroom . . . " (1995, p.1).

Specifically, the courses typically contain units on methodology, second language acquisition, discourse analysis, syllabus design, testing, phonetics, and sociolinguistics. However, the prospective student should carefully examine the subject list, since in some courses certain topics are optional, whereas in others they are compulsory. For example, there is a compulsory module at Surrey and Birmingham, whereas it is a part of the optional language module at Sheffield. In addition, some topics are not available in all courses. The student interested in CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), for instance, will be satisfied only by the CALL optional unit available at Aston, and someone wishing to learn about literature in TESOL must choose Surrey.
The structures of the courses vary considerably. Most courses have a diploma stage followed by an MA or MSc stage. For example, a post-graduate diploma is awarded by Surrey after 12 modules are completed, by Moray House and Aston after five modules, and by Sheffield after four. Typically, courses consist of a set of core modules followed by several options. For example, at Moray House the structure is five core and three options while at Sheffield it is one core and three options. In addition, the size and composition of the pool of options varies.

Two courses, Aston and Birmingham, have a different structure altogether. Aston has two parts (a diploma stage and an MSc stage). But where most universities offer more choice in the later stage, here the options precede the compulsory modules. The first part consists of five compulsory modules followed by one option chosen from seven, and the second stage is made up of the compulsory modules Description of Modern English and Lexical Studies. On the other hand, the Birmingham course uniquely groups its 12 modules, all compulsory, in six cycles. All five university courses require the presentation of a final dissertation of 10,000 to 20,000 words (see Appendix 1).

### Course Duration

A DL MA takes roughly two years, but practically speaking, students cannot expect to see a degree certificate on their walls until about 30 months from starting. Furthermore, the prospective student should check carefully about regulations concerning time off. At Surrey, for example, the MA must be completed within 36 months of finishing the Diploma stage. At Sheffield, the course may be spread out over as much as six years. The time allowed for each module is typically two months, involving about 60 hours of study. The dissertation is normally submitted four months after completion of the last course module.

### Entrance Requirements

The entry requirements for DL MAs are a Bachelor's degree along with some teaching experience. The degree does not have to be from a British university. The length of the teaching experience varies from course to course: At Aston it is simply "substantial" (1995, p. 2), at Birmingham, Surrey and Sheffield two years minimum, and at Moray House it is three years. Some courses (Aston for example) now require prospective students to write a short paper or take an interview before matriculating.

The courses are open to students who are not native speakers of English providing that they can demonstrate their English proficiency, normally by submitting copies of their TOEFL certificate. At Birmingham, for example, a score of at least 550 is required. However, non-native speakers should be aware that the course reading and writing assignments demand a high level of English proficiency.

### Method

Students receive printed material and then send in written assignments based on this material and other reading. At specified intervals the student receives booklets by mail. In addition, students usually need to acquire one or two books per module. This can pose problems for students in remote locations. However, for Aston students, there are resource centers in Nagoya and Tokyo where books may be borrowed. In contrast, Moray House claims to provide all necessary reading material. Many students find that their local university libraries can help out with books and especially periodicals (Busch, 1994). Another type of printed material is the DL bi-monthly newsletter published by Aston and Surrey.

The assignments required of students are of two types. There are short questions to answer on the basis of prescribed texts. Substantial papers must also be submitted by mail or, at some universities, for example, they may be emailed. The number of these assignment papers varies from four at Aston and Sheffield to ten at Surrey. The required length of papers also varies: from 2,500 to 3,000 words at Surrey; from 3,000 to 5,000 at Aston (see Appendix 1).

These assignments are generally lengthy essays providing evidence both of wide reading on the topic and an ability to present a coherent argument. The assignments grant students considerable freedom to choose topics within the module subject area, but they also impose the responsibility of shaping a substantial essay in a serious academic format.

For most modules, particularly for methodology, syllabus design, and testing, students are expected to draw on their own teaching experience. For others, sociolinguistics or discourse analysis for example, students may be expected to undertake some practical research. Students may also choose essays with a more theoretical orientation, especially in modules such as discourse analysis, (Surrey, Aston) phonology (Birmingham, Surrey) or typology (Surrey).

### Guidance

Feedback on each paper is sent by mail in written or audiotaped form. In most programs, assignment papers are checked by two markers, your personal tutor for that subject and one faculty member who does not know you. Students can also receive feedback or support anytime from their personal tutor who is available by telephone, letter, fax or email throughout the course.

In addition, support through local centers is available on two courses. At Aston's resource centers students are expected to co-operate with their study partners. Birmingham holds a summer seminar in Hiroshima. Students are expected to attend in order to learn from visiting lecturers and to receive individual guidance. On the Sheffield course, students are expected to attend four residential weekends at the university campus in Britain. Aston and Birmingham send tutors from Britain to its students, and Surrey sends a lecturer once a year to Tokyo to meet current and prospective students. In spite of this support, the views of a range of current students and the statements printed in the introductory course material indicate that DL students need considerable self-discipline to handle the course load effectively.

### Assessment

Progress is assessed either by examination, assignment results or both. Examinations are held in Japan by Aston, Surrey and Moray House. The Aston exams are held on two occasions and the Surrey and Moray House exams only once. Surrey students must arrange an examination room at an approved location (university or British Council office), and recruit a suitably qualified proctor. The examination then takes place within a specified one week period, with the proctor acting as the local administrator. The four examinations take three hours each, and consist of essay questions. On the other hand, Birmingham and Sheffield base assessments on assignment results only. However, in all cases the compulsory dissertation carries considerable weight.

Typically (at Surrey for example) the grades awarded for assignments range from fail (less than 40) to Distinction (70+), with intermediate "pass at diploma level" (40-49) and "pass at MA level" (50-69). An assignment receiving a failing grade may be resubmitted. Grades of 80 or more are only awarded for papers of an exceptionally high standard.

### Cost

Finally, the cost varies considerably from course to course (see Appendix 1). Assuming exchange rates of £1 = US$1.55 = ¥165, the course fees range from £2,600 ($4,030, ¥29,000 ) to £7,878 ($11,818, ¥1,300,000). Courses with no local help (Moray House, Surrey) are at the lower end of the range, while those with facilities in Japan (Aston, Birmingham) are more expensive - even before counting travel expenses to Hiroshima for Birmingham's summer seminar, or to Aston's resource center meetings in Nagoya or Tokyo.

### A Check List

The potential DL student in TESOL should consider the following:

1. Time: Can I afford two years or more to complete the course?
2. Money: Can I be sure to pay the fees on time (see payment options in Appendix 1), and can I afford the supplementary books, stationery and traveling expenses?
3. Content: Am I really interested in the subjects covered on the course?
4. Structure: Is the sequence of modules of interest to me?
5. Entrance Requirements: Do I have the necessary qualifications, teaching experience, and academic writing skills?
6. Methodology: Does the method suit me - private study only, contact with a local group, or short courses?
7. Guidance: Can I receive the assistance I need?
8. Assessment: Can I attend examinations?
9. Equipment: Do I have access to a word processor (and tax or modem where appropriate)?

### Conclusion

As a TESOL master's degree becomes the minimum requirement for gaining a full-time post in a Japanese university, teachers are turning to options for study in Japan: branch campus or distance learning courses. Distance learning at British universities provides a realistic means of gaining credentials while continuing to live and work in Japan. The variety of subjects, teaching methods, and course structures offers a considerable range of choice to an equally wide range of students. By the same token, potential students should examine the course requirements and offerings thoroughly to see which best suit their needs. How firmly these courses will establish their credibility remains to be seen and depends largely on the performance of their graduates. They are academic courses, and will challenge students of all backgrounds. The student must assume the responsibility for the required reading and research, which demand considerable self-discipline. For those of you with sufficient time and mental energy, two years' advanced academic study can be personally challenging, intellectually fulfilling, and career-boosting.
Aston University, (1995). M.Sc./Diploma in teaching English (TE) or teaching English for specific purposes (TESP) by distance learning. (Publicity material) Aston University, U.K.


### Appendix 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Surrey</th>
<th>Birmingham</th>
<th>Moray House Institute of Education</th>
<th>Aston</th>
<th>Sheffield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Address</strong></td>
<td>English Language Institute University of Surrey Guildford GU25XH U.K.</td>
<td>David English House Polesta Bldg 7-5 Nakamichi Naka-ku, Hiroshima 730</td>
<td>Heriot-Watt University Holyrood Road Edinburgh EH148AE U.K.</td>
<td>Language Studies Unit Dept of Modern Languages Aston University Birmingham B4 7ET, U.K.</td>
<td>University of Sheffield Division of Education 388 Glossop Road Sheffield S10 2JA, U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fax</strong></td>
<td>44-1843-259-507</td>
<td>082-244-2633</td>
<td>44-131-557-5138</td>
<td>44-21-359-2725</td>
<td>44-114-278-8318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Telephone</strong></td>
<td>44-1483-259-910</td>
<td>082-244-2633</td>
<td>44-131-558-6337</td>
<td>44-21-359-3611</td>
<td>44-114-276-8970 44-114-282-4149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course title</strong></td>
<td>Master of Arts in Linguistics (TESOL)</td>
<td>Master of Arts in TESL/TEFL</td>
<td>Master of Arts in TESOL</td>
<td>Master of Science in Teaching English for Specific Purposes</td>
<td>Master of Education in Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start dates</strong></td>
<td>October, March</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>Any time</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
<td>27 months</td>
<td>26 months</td>
<td>2-6 years</td>
<td>20-36 months</td>
<td>2-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance</strong></td>
<td>No (but optional meeting with visiting lecturer)</td>
<td>5-day course in Hiroshima, August, year 1. 1-day tutorial, year 2 (local)</td>
<td>No, but there is an attendance option</td>
<td>No, but there are &quot;resource centers&quot; in Nagoya and Tokyo</td>
<td>4 residential weekends in Sheffield: yr 1 Sept. Yr 2 Sept. Mar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core modules</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optional modules</strong></td>
<td>2 out of 9</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3 out of 14</td>
<td>1 out of 8</td>
<td>3 out of 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examinations</strong></td>
<td>2x3 hours, Month 16</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2 core modules</td>
<td>4x3 hours at local exam center</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assignment number/length</strong></td>
<td>10: 2,000-3,000 words</td>
<td>12: 2,000 words</td>
<td>8: 5,000 words</td>
<td>4: 3,000-5,000 words</td>
<td>4: 6,000 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dissertation Length</strong></td>
<td>10-12,000 words</td>
<td>12,000 words</td>
<td>20,000 words</td>
<td>10,000-20,000 words</td>
<td>20,000 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fees (U.K.£)</strong></td>
<td>£3,700 (2x£1,850) + £1,300</td>
<td>4x£325,000 = £1,300,000</td>
<td>a) in advance £4,180</td>
<td>£6,100</td>
<td>UK, EU citizens a) £1,300+£1300 or b) 2x£260+6x£175] non-UK, non-EU £1,800+£1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>email: <a href="mailto:eli@surrrey.ac.uk">eli@surrrey.ac.uk</a>, Internet: <a href="http://www.surrey.ac.uk/eli.html">http://www.surrey.ac.uk/eli.html</a></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>email: <a href="mailto:SU@Aston.ac.uk">SU@Aston.ac.uk</a> &quot;Study partners&quot; system</td>
<td>email: <a href="mailto:dlu@sheffield.ac.uk">dlu@sheffield.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix 2

**Other MA Courses in TESOL**

1. University of Wollongong
The Centre for Foreign Language Education, University of Wollongong, Northfields Avenue. Wollongong, NSW. 2522. Australia. (Japan office: Peter Anderson, 4-27-32-1A12 Ikejiri, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo, 154)

2. Macquarie University
Overseas Studies Office, Centre for Open Education, Macquarie University. NSW. 2109. Australia. Fax: +61-2-850 7470; Tel: 61-2-850 7470; email: <davi.ha@mq.edu.au>

3. Edith Cowan University
P.O. Box 830, Claremont, WA. 6010. Australia. Tel: +61-9-273 8500; Fax: 61-9-442-1330; email: <extudi@aichidna.cowan edu.au>

4. The University of Southern Queensland

5. Hawthorne University (Utah, U.S.A.)

The author would like to thank Stephen B. Ryan (Aichi Prefectural University) for his assistance.

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This is an important qualification in a career in English language teaching. A masters will often qualify you to teach in university type situations. It’s often a qualification also for teachers who maybe are moving to another country further up the career ladder. And nowadays we also see an increasing number of teachers who are going on to do PhDs.

University of Birmingham. Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Distance Learning), M.A. Continue your search. 2019-06-01 00:00:00 Unavailable. The new Postgraduate Loan (PGL) for Masters degrees in the UK is available for students normally residing in England. The main details of the new Postgraduate Loan are: A loan of up to £10,609 will be made available to students applying to taught and research Masters courses. The loan will be available to students across all discipline subject areas for full-time, part-time and distance learning Masters programmes, so long as you do not have existing qualifications at Masters-level or above (which includes undergraduate integrated Masters qualifications, such as MSci or MEng etc). Completing a TESOL master’s degree program may allow students to qualify for higher paying positions. In addition, students are able to learn skills to improve their teaching abilities and enable them to work with a range of different non-native English learners. Because of variances between programs at each school, it is difficult to offer a cost estimate. Students who wish to know more about costs should inquire with their chosen institution. By completing an MA in TESOL program, graduates may be able to increase their teaching knowledge and skills to work at advanced levels or gain a position...