

Whitehall Virtual Languages – FAQs

Spring Term 2020 (from January)

Background

Professional Language Solutions (PLS) is the official Prime Provider of language training to the FCO (for all languages except French), and has contracts with many other Central Government departments. We are now offering self-funded virtual language classes which are aimed specifically at civil servants across Whitehall and beyond.

We offer these self-sponsored virtual classes three times per year – broadly in line with the academic year. These courses are open to government employees in any location, as all courses are Online, delivered by real teachers using Zoom, an enterprise-level Virtual Classroom technology.

Our virtual classrooms are equipped with all required functionality, such as interactive whiteboards, screen-sharing, virtual break out rooms, live chat, and resource sharing.

How do I enrol?

To express your interest, complete our booking form. You will not be asked to pay at this point. We will then contact you with information on how to enrol and pay.

What equipment do I need?

You can access Zoom from any device which permits you to download the app. You will need headphones and a microphone, and uninterrupted access to the internet. Detailed instructions on how to download and access Zoom will be provided.

How much does it cost?

Course for Spring Term 2020 all cost £199 including VAT. This is for a course of 15 hours (12 sessions of 75 minutes per week). Refunds are not available once the course has been confirmed. Payment will guarantee a place in the group.

What languages are on offer?

For the Spring Term 2020 - French, German & Spanish.

Other languages such as Russian, Farsi, Mandarin and Japanese are currently offered on a 1:1 basis. Virtual group classes are likely to be offered in these languages in the future, so do let us know if you would like to be put on a waiting list for one of these other languages.

How many people are in a virtual class?

Classes have a minimum of 3 participants and a maximum of 6. This very small group size is designed to give every participant plenty of time to practise the key skill of speaking.

What time will the classes take place?

Depending on language and level, classes are offered:

- mornings (from 08.00 to 09.15, or from 08.30 to 09.45, or from 09.30 to 10.45),
- lunchtime (from 12.00 to 13.15, or from 12.30 to 13.45)
- evening (from either 17.00 to 18.15, or from 18.30 to 19.45).

Lessons will run for 75 minutes at the same day/time each week for 12 consecutive weeks.

When do the classes start?

The classes will start w/c 20th January 2020. These will run for 12 weeks. In the case of public holidays alternative dates will be scheduled.

How do I know my level?

If you are not sure about your current level, please contact us.

What if I pay but cannot attend the lessons?

We are unable to offer refunds to students who, for whatever reason, cannot attend the whole course. We regret that we are unable to offer pro-rata rates for partial attendance of courses. In the event that we are unable to run a course due to insufficient participants, a full refund will be provided.

Will I need to do any preparation or homework?

A small amount of revision and/or preparation work will be advised for each lesson (apart from the 1st lesson).

Are tutors native speakers?

Yes, all our tutors are native-speakers, and meet the MPRs (Minimum Professional requirements) set by the FCO. They have experience teaching diplomats, civil servants and professionals.

What do lessons cover?

All our courses focus on the two main skills of Speaking and Listening. Topics focus on practical topics of general interest to civil servants and government staff, helping you to build confidence when dealing with everyday language situations.

Do I need a course book?

No. Our courses are all topic-based, and focus on the communicative skills of Speaking and Listening in contexts which are relevant to our target audience (government officials and civil servants). We will provide recommendations for free Apps which can be used for self-study and for learning general vocabulary.

Note : If you would like a customised language course just for yourself, we can arrange this on a 1:1 basis, either through virtual classrooms or with face to face tuition (dependant on your location). Please contact us for further details.