

# Alba's Anniversary: English language school celebrates its first decade

## Alba English School in Causewayside is celebrating its tenth Anniversary.

Since October 2022 the [school](#) has helped thousands of students improve their English, pass exams, and advance their careers. Many Alba 'graduates' have subsequently settled in the city, working in fields as varied as finance, dentistry and tourism.

Known for its quality teaching, affordability, and flexibility, the school has built a strong reputation in its first decade. As it reaches this milestone, Alba is going through a period of expansion, and is also seeking to adapt to a much changed business climate in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) sector. Brexit and the pandemic have impacted this area significantly with many schools closing. There are, however, now some perceptible signs of a recovery.



Alongside cities such as Oxford, London and Bournemouth, Edinburgh has long been a leading TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) destination. Students are drawn to Edinburgh by the beauty and historical interest of the city and the high reputation of many of the English language schools. The students only discover the distinctly 'changeable' weather once they arrive.

The TEFL sector is a significant part of the UK's economy. According to [English UK](#), the ELT industry was, prior to Covid, generating around £1.4 billion income for the UK each year and supporting around 35,700 jobs. However, it often goes under

the radar as most people in the UK have minimal interaction with it. They might only become aware of the size of the sector when visiting a tourist attraction and finding themselves stuck behind a group of backpacked teenagers from an EU country.

The entire TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) sector in the UK has been badly affected by the twin blows of the pandemic and Brexit. Many schools have closed for good, while others have limped on, switching to online teaching during the depths of the pandemic. More than 50% of staff in the EFL sector were laid off during that period as student numbers fell by 79%. A substantial number of teachers left the sector for good.

Operating schools during the pandemic posed many difficulties. Due to the need to maintain social distance, classes had to be limited in size. This severely dented income. Furthermore, it was difficult to maintain a 'communicative' classroom atmosphere in such circumstances. When wearing face coverings, it was difficult to practise key aspects of the language, such as pronunciation. This period of uncertainty required schools and teachers to be very adaptable.

Among the Edinburgh schools to have shut in recent years include Mackenzie, Global, and Caledonian, while Berlitz closed its physical premises on Frederick Street. The majority of schools are now looking ahead with greater optimism. Kaplan International Languages hopes to move from their present home in Albyn Place to new premises at 26 St Andrew Square, with capacity for 300 students and employing up to 34 staff. TLI (The Language Institute), previously on Palmerston Place, has had a peripatetic existence over the last few years but is now on the verge of moving into new premises in Leith.



### Alba's base in Causewayside

Alba English School is currently expanding. Having been based in the second floor of the business centre at 86-92 Causewayside, Alba has now taken over use of the ground floor of the building. Originally a police station, the building is an interesting, labyrinthine place. It is still evident where the cells were located, and students might be motivated by them to complete their homework!

Alba English offers a range of classes, from beginner (A1) to proficiency (C2) levels. General English is the focus in the mornings, followed by small afternoon classes tailored to students' individual needs (for example, business or aviation English). Evening classes focus on preparation for the major English language exams, such as FCE, CPE and IELTS (International English Language Testing System). Gaining a good IELTS score is a prerequisite for overseas students getting into a UK university. Hence the need for high quality

preparation classes which focus on the language aspects of the exams as well as the strategies needed to optimise performance.

Unlike many other language schools in the city, Alba is an independent and relatively small institution. As a result of the current expansion, there will be seven classrooms and a significantly increased amount of communal space. Over coffee, tea and biscuits, students from a variety of countries (and levels of English) are able to chat and learn about each others' cultures. English language schools, at their best, can be great meeting points and promoters of cultural understanding. The school organises regular social events to further foster this sense of community, as well as provide additional opportunities for students to use newly acquired language.



Alba students have a class on the Meadows

Alba English's Academic Manager believes the company's success has been driven by this sense of community. "One thing I think the Alba has always been good at is the focus on employing very good teachers and being student focused". The school has been able to support students in the classroom and beyond, "whether it's a shoulder to cry on, CV help, general encouragement and support". In some cases, students' stay at Alba may be their first experience living alone and abroad. Using the third conditional or modal verbs accurately may not be the biggest challenges for students. One former student put it nicely in saying that, at Alba "I found here a second house when I moved to Edinburgh". Another student said that 'the friendly environment and the teachers' preparation made me enjoy studying English!'.



In its second decade, Alba English hopes to continue being a hub for international students interested in improving their English, starting a new career or discovering Scottish culture. They are looking forward to seeing new students enjoy their expanded space and supporting them in their language learning journeys.

Further information about Alba English can be found at [albaenglish.co.uk](http://albaenglish.co.uk)



**Alba**

**English School**