

Secretarial courses in the UK

Secretarial courses in the UK offer international students the chance to learn valuable career skills as well as consolidate their English language abilities.

Secretarial courses in the UK come in all shapes and sizes, varying from short courses where the emphasis is on brushing up or developing office skills, to year-long diploma courses that prepare students for all aspects of office work. International students wanting to work in the UK or simply improve their English while gaining valuable new skills can be assured of finding something to suit their needs.

As a good command of the English language is particularly important for those wanting to go on to work as a secretary in an English-speaking environment, students may find that this is a key requirement for entry at many secretarial colleges. At Reid Kerr College in Scotland, students can enrol on foundation-level courses without formal academic qualifications but 'a standard knowledge of both written and spoken English is both preferred and recommended', according to Hazel Mulberry, International Officer.

However, some colleges, such as Queen's Business and Secretarial College in London, combine their secretarial courses with language teaching and, depending on a student's language ability, they can choose different courses. 'We have a one-term certificate or two-term diploma course for overseas



students,' says Corinne Bickford at the college. 'Or, if their language is very advanced, students can join a course for students with English as a first language.'

Students on the business English with computer skills course offered at Queen's are instructed in IT, business administration and business English skills -covering business vocabulary, business correspondence and spoken English in work situations -and at the end of their course, they receive a business English and secretarial qualification.

According to Bickford, secretarial courses can be a natural progression for those originally coming to the UK to learn English. 'Students often come after studying in a language school looking for a different way of improving their English and picking up more skills at the same time,' she says.

However, as the English language has become an important medium for international business, secretaries and office workers worldwide also find that enrolling on a secretarial course in the UK can be good for their career. Sandra Steketeer from Lexton Language Programmes in the Netherlands has been sending clients to an English for secretaries course in the UK for a number of years.

'During the last [few] years, there has been quite some interest in secretarial courses,' she says. 'The Netherlands loses business deals and turnover due to misunderstandings because of bad communication in foreign languages.' After completing a course, her clients go back to their job in the Netherlands. 'Often, the course has been paid for by their company.'

According to Gina Lowes at St James's & Lucie Clayton Colleges in London, many international students enrol on secretarial courses with the ultimate goal of continuing their career in the UK. 'Our colleges have an associated recruitment consultancy, which meets with students regularly and helps them find work. We have a definite onus on career guidance and support for students,' she says.

The content of secretarial courses in the UK varies, especially if there is a language component involved, but there are a number of qualifications available (see right). The changing requirements of business as well as developments in IT mean that courses have to be constantly revised. 'We are constantly addressing the demands of the marketplace,' says Lowes. 'The role of the personal assistant has changed greatly and involves more administration and project management, and keyboard and IT skills are now needed by everyone.'

Secretarial and business English qualifications available in the UK

Oxford Cambridge and RSA - www.ocr.org.uk
RSA Certificate in Administrative and Secretarial Procedures; RSA Diploma in Administrative and Secretarial Procedures; Higher Diploma in Administrative and Secretarial Procedures

Pitman qualifications - www.pitmanqualifications.com
English for Office Skills, levels 1-2; English for Business Communications, levels 1-3; Secretarial and Administration Diploma, levels 1-3; Basic Business Skills Certificate, level 1; Office Procedures, level 2; Administration and Secretarial Procedures, level 3

London Chamber of Commerce and Industry Examinations Board (LCCIEB) - www.lccieb.org.uk
English for Business, levels 1-4; Diploma in Secretarial Administration

University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) - www.ucles.org.uk
Business English Certificates, levels 1-3; Certificate in English for International Business and Trade (CEIBT)

Selection of colleges offering secretarial or English for secretaries courses in the UK

	Location	Use agents?	No. of students	% int. students
City of Bristol College	Bristol		40,000	8
GEOS English Academy	Hove	✓	145	100
Guildford College	Guildford	✓	20,000	1
Pitman Training Centre	Edinburgh		1,250	5
Queen's Business & Secretarial College	London	✓	300	5
Ravenscourt Tutorial College	London		15	5
Reid Kerr College	Paisley	✓	10,000	5
St James's & Lucie Clayton Colleges	London		160	5
West Kent College	Tonbridge	✓	2,300	5
Weston College	Weston-super-Mare		1,368	5