



# Human Stories

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## Learning how to teach Ukrainian displaced learners in the Netherlands

From 22 to 25 August, Warsaw hosted the [Teaching and Learning in Difficult Times](#) programme, developed and delivered by the British Council. It is targeted at English teachers from European countries welcoming Ukrainian displaced students in their classrooms. Its objective was delving into the impact of the Ukraine war on education and help teachers identify the inherent difficulties appearing in conflict areas while exploring ways in which they can support learners.

Agnese Vaškūna (English teacher, Latvia) shares her first impressions and learnings following her participation in the programme with us. Agnese moved to the Netherlands in March 2022, after seeing how the Ukraine war was raising tension in the Baltics and some family members started losing their jobs. Find out more about the experience of a Latvian displaced teacher in turn helping displaced Ukrainian students in the Netherlands.

'I think the Summer School is a fantastic opportunity to learn more about how trauma affects the human brain and what teachers can do about it in the classroom. It is very important for teachers to take care of themselves to be able to help others. Only when a teacher feels happy, they can inspire others and give hope. A teacher's job is not only about teaching a subject, but also about interaction, communication, human relationships, and changing lives.

With this in mind, I must say that it is also very valuable to interact with Ukrainian colleagues and listen to their experiences and challenges. [...] They need to know that they are not alone in this situation, that we are all united, stand with them and are ready to help.

So far, I have been working with adults who live in the refugee centre in the city of Breda in the Netherlands. Our team has been teaching English to 25 Ukrainian adults. From September, I will work with Ukrainian teenagers in Saturday school which has been founded to help the students get through the Ukrainian and Dutch programmes.

People we work with come from different backgrounds. They have different life stories. A lot of them had good jobs back in Ukraine, but now they are doing something simpler [...] because they do not know the local language. This can be very challenging and psychologically difficult.

I have fantastic colleagues and we try not just to teach English but organise different events outside the refugee centre to create a sense of community and belonging. I am very happy to be able to help and I have a feeling that I am doing something meaningful and important. We, as Latvians, share a common past with Ukrainians and therefore we understand one another really well'.

# Building the new Ukrainian school in a war context

Since 2021, the British Council is partnering with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine to ensure sustainability in modern English language teaching and to provide teachers with the opportunity to develop their skills under the **New Ukrainian School** concept. A total of 7,000 professionals have taken part in this online programme. Ivan Koperlos (a teacher facilitator) shares his story.

'I was pretty impressed by the vibes at the British Council course I was participating in. I felt it was the environment where I wanted to develop my teaching skills and soon, one of my facilitators suggested that I should try to become a facilitator as well.

Once a teacher becomes more confident and feels his or her professional skills have upgraded, the way of interacting with the students is changing for the better. The course is a great chance to develop the teacher's speaking skills so there's a bigger chance that the teacher is going to increase English speaking time in the class. The more interaction in English, the better the results of the students.

In light of the war context, we have become even more responsible and willing to work. It's like when you break a part of a plant and it tries to grow even more wilfully. It's the same with teachers [...] I also believe that we should start talking about the psychological aspects of a successful teacher, his or her emotional intelligence, self-respect, and confidence. Being a self-sufficient person is one of the prerequisites of a modern and capable teacher.

When thinking of the future Ukrainian school, the first thing that comes to my mind is a small group of learners taking part in activities which are mostly done in the form of workshops, pair, or group projects during more than just three lessons a week. No matter if it is going to be distanced or face to face [...] Stephen Hawking said, "Intelligence is the ability to adapt to changes". And in our case, I believe, it's also the ability to make the changes'.



# Achieving your goals with the IELTS Award

The [IELTS Award](#) is a contest promoted by the British Council in Germany, Greece, Uzbekistan, and Spain. It seeks to recognise young students with the potential and motivation to contribute to society with their studies. This award grants up to 10,000 euros to study any degree or postgraduate programme in English, abroad, or in each participating country helping the winner cover tuition fees or accommodation expenses. The winners become IELTS Ambassadors, sharing their great experiences and inspiring others.

This year's Spain winner, Aida Lorca Arce, is a 22-year-old student of the master's programme in International Security at the University of Groningen. Prospectively, she would like to become an analyst specialising in security and work for an international organisation such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) or the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) and participate in their missions in the field. The IELTS Award Spain gave Aida extra help to achieve her dreams.

'The award allows me to focus on my master's degree, and join a reputable university, the University of Groningen. This will give me the tools to develop as a professional and better address the present and future challenges that Spain, the European Union, or NATO are going to face. I no longer need my family to make a major economic effort to support me, which puts them and myself at ease.

In my opinion, studying abroad is a life-changing experience. I have already done it as an exchange student, and I always recommend everyone to participate in an Erasmus or bilateral program. So, participating in the process of the IELTS Award Spain has given me the opportunity to live again outside my country, this time for a longer time and with a different perspective. I now have a clearer objective and, ultimately, studying for a master's is an incredible step to get the job of my dreams, or discover a new one.

If you're considering applying for the IELTS Award, or any other British Council programme, dash not hyphen: go for it! People are often too worried about failing and prefer not to take the leap. There is always someone nicer, smarter, or more in need than yourself; but we all have something unique to contribute and you need to believe in yourself. The good thing about the IELTS Award is that there are no barriers. If you want to make a difference and offer your abilities to society, you are more than welcome to apply'.





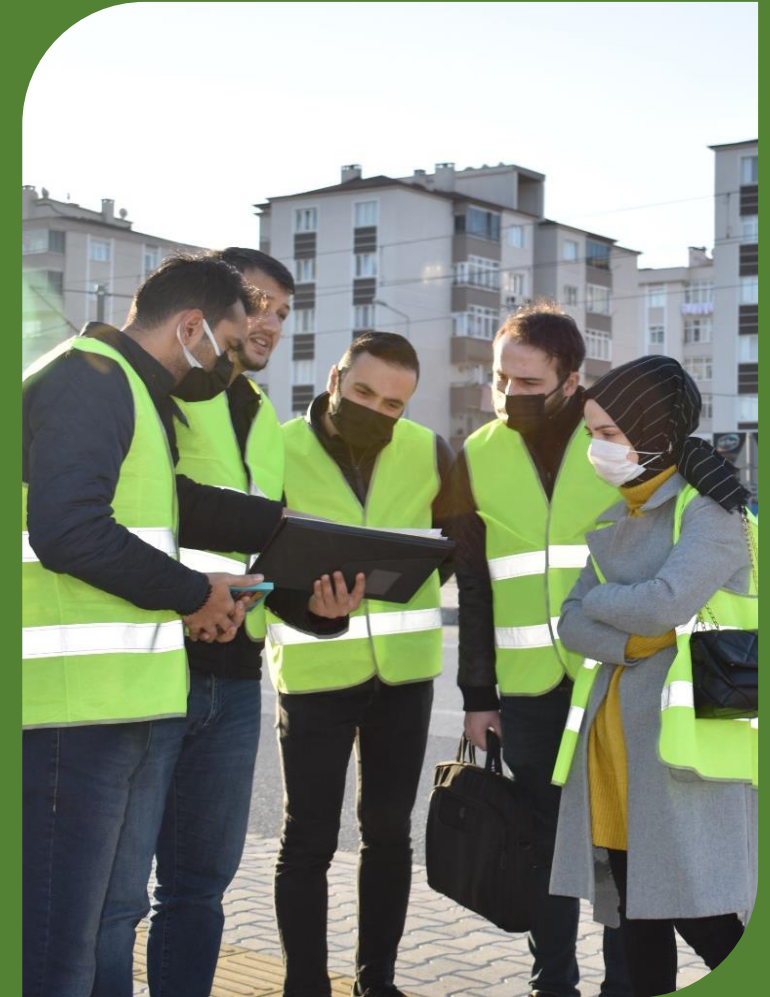
# Greener cities with intelligent transportation systems

**Associate Professor Metin Mutlu Aydın, Ondokuz Mayıs University, shares his experience on UK-Turkey higher education institutional partnerships as one of the grantees of the Connect4Innovation fund. He explains to us how this fund benefited him to implement his initiative on green cities for the first time in Turkey.**

'In recent years, transportation planners, researchers, and decision-makers have taken steps towards the development of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) the widespread use of e-vehicles instead of fossil fuels to solve problems related to traffic such as air pollution, noise pollution and traffic accidents by using developed technology and opportunities. Significant progress has been made in the utilization of these technologies in traffic and transportation planning however the biggest problem is finding qualified experts during the implementation and operation of these systems. In collaboration with Cardiff University, we aim to train qualified individuals in ITS and green cities, contribute to their self-training and reduce the shortage of qualified personnel in the relevant fields with our project.

With our focus on project-based education, the participants will have the opportunity to see all process steps from the beginning to the end of the Smart City Traffic Safety project which we conduct in partnership with Samsun Metropolitan Municipality and the biggest technology and defence company in Turkey, Aselsan. They will learn how to analyse and interpret the big data coming from the ITS systems as well as the installation and operation. They will be able to interpret and compare the old and new situation of climate change in the transformation into a green and intelligent city by using the newly learned simulation and calculation methods.

Thanks to our partnership with Cardiff University and their experiences and knowledge, the participants of the project now have the chance to see similarly conducted projects in the UK and students and researchers in the UK and Turkey will get opportunities to access new scholarships and internships to attend exchange and education programmes'.





## English Courses with Fundación ONCE | Guided by our students

**The British Council's collaboration with ONCE (Spanish National Organisation of the Blind) started in 2019, with an agreement to promote accessibility to English language learning for blind and visually impaired people. Last February, this commitment became reality in the form of online English classes for 24 secondary school students across Spain. Ruth Horsfall, project lead and Young Learner Courses Manager Spain, shares her experience with us.**

‘Like ONCE, we have clear values which support equality, inclusion, and diversity and together our mission is to provide opportunities for these young people to allow them to opt for future studies or work where English is required. Before the course started, we adapted the contents from an accessibility perspective, but we didn’t change our pedagogy or approach to English language learning. We used Secondary Plus, a series of magazine-style materials, as well as providing tasks and projects to help develop core 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as critical thinking, creativity and citizenship.

The project to adapt the content and thus provide the students with greater accessibility was an inspiring and fascinating task, thanks to the expertise of the ONCE education team. We looked at how we could integrate Jaws, the screen reader software used by some of the visually impaired students, into the lessons and how to present and practise new language in the online lessons in a way that all learners could follow and participate.

It began as a steep learning curve, but we quickly adapted to the classes. Any preconceived notions we had about how the students might be limited by their visual impairment were blown out of the window. They are simply amazing.

I’m very positive about the experience. Our vision for the future is to continue and see this project grow and to expand our provision of English classes, based on the knowledge and experience gained with ONCE. We aim to welcome an increasing number of people with blindness or severe visual impairment. With all this in mind, we already have everything prepared for the new two-class course starting in October this year’.





## From selling toys to establishing an academy on entrepreneurship

**Started his entrepreneurial career at the age of five by selling toys, Vlad Buzoianu (Romania) talks about how his education at the University of Essex led him to develop a career as an entrepreneur.**

'I started my first little business aged five by selling toys. Since then, I've been in and out of entrepreneurial initiatives. Hence, I decided to add some knowledge to my talent and chose to study in the UK because of its educational reputation in this field. My studies in the UK made me fall in love with my future profession. The most important thing I learned during my degree was critical thinking and this helped me challenge different thought patterns in every business.

I lead a local investment fund in real estate and at its helm, I innovated the Romanian office market, transforming a brick-and-mortar business into a business about ecosystems and communities and inspiring all my competitors to do the same. With the knowledge from my studies, I created an informal academy to teach students entrepreneurship and values and together with my partners, trained over 500 students and hired over 100.

My advice for those just starting their careers would be to try things! Look for the experience and for the right people to grow along with. Everything you do has hidden lessons and adds up to the masterpieces of your lifetime. It is designed to give you perspectives and styles to copy while forming your own. Take the paved way, make it better or create your own lane!

I must thank my education in the UK for providing me with this opportunity and giving me new perspectives to bring positive change in my home country and beyond'.

# Transforming Lithuanian schools through leadership coaching

**For the last two years, the British Council has supported the Lithuanian Government with its reform of the national school curriculum. The European Commission-funded project [Supporting School Principals as Leaders in the Curriculum Reform in Lithuania](#) has trained a group of almost 300 school principals in the techniques of instructional leadership to help them implement the renewed school curriculum in the country.**

Irma Kačinauskienė started working at Prienai Ziburys Gymnasium as a teacher 17 years ago before moving on to principal deputy and later becoming principal. Her professional motto is 'more trust and less control, together we can do everything!'.

'I have become a school principal who has competencies in leadership, teachers' professional development, inclusive education and school's cultural development. I have developed myself as a mature school leader ready to lead my education community towards to a modern and open school.

During the programme, I discovered practical examples of other countries' experiences implementing curriculum reforms, participated in discussions and built a network. I enjoyed lectures given by the British Council trainers, who raised questions that made me think about the reform in education in Lithuania, and its success.

I analysed different successful school leadership examples, practical examples of coaching and coaching practice, and ideas about instructional leadership. I learned from colleagues and trainers. But the most important thing is that I have become an educational leadership consultant and shared gained knowledge with other principals in Lithuania, encouraging them to implement new competency-based curricula effectively.

The knowledge and experience I received helps me to make a significant contribution to changing the school leadership model. Now, together with the staff, I concentrate on building a culture of high performance. I pay more attention to teachers' professional training. [...], apply leadership coaching, – a GROW model – , with teachers and students to encourage teachers' better performance working with children, and communicating and collaborating with their colleagues. In turn, I also work on students' better performance during lessons that leads to better results for them'.







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