

EL Teaching Prospects in Germany

Germany is suffering from a recession. The slow down in the economy has led to cuts in EFL training programmes in both the private and state sectors. Few areas of EFL teaching have been left unscathed and there are not many signs that this trend will change in the near future.

Germany is unusual in the TEFL world because between 80-90% of all EFL teaching work is done on a freelance basis. Finding work as a salaried teacher with a guaranteed number of hours is increasingly difficult. Even German universities have begun to move towards employing freelance EFL lecturers, or only offer temporary contracts. Finding teaching work in a state school is impossible unless you speak fluent German and have a “recognised” teaching qualification – most German states do not recognise teaching qualifications from other countries.

Finding teaching work is hard and getting harder. EFL teachers thinking of working in Germany should bear in mind that they will have to compete with a growing number of “local” teachers who are down on their hours. Still, if you are specialised in Business English or English for Special Purposes, your chances of finding work will be better.

Cities such as Frankfurt and Munich are home to banking, insurance, IT, aerospace and electronics seem to have been particularly badly hit by cuts in EFL programmes. The training budget at one of the companies I teach at was cut by 30% at the beginning of this year and the trainers were asked to accept a 10% cut in their rates. Most companies are also reviewing their language training programmes. The days when any employee could enrol for an extensive English course are numbered. Andy Hewitson, a training manager at Siemens AG, says that EL training in most of the bigger companies here is being realigned to reflect strategic necessity... in other words, if you don't need English to do your job, you won't be offered a course.

Some areas of Germany still seem to be relatively unaffected. The director of BEST, a business English school based in Düsseldorf said that their courses were up by over 10% last year. Certainly the new “Länder” – the German states of the ex-GDR - still seem to be looking for EFL teachers.

If you are looking for teaching work from outside Germany, one of the simplest ways of finding most of the language schools in a particular city is to search Germany's Yellow Pages <http://www.gelbeseiten.de/yp/quick.jp>. Type in “*Sprachenschulen*” in the “*Was suchen Sie?*” box and the name of the city you are interested in working in, in the “*Wo suchen Sie?*” box, then click on the “*Suche Starten*” button. Some of the English Language Teachers' Association here also post ads for teaching jobs, e.g. <http://www.melta.de/jobs.htm>. Employers are reluctant to employ teachers without interviewing them in person, so given the current surplus of “local” EFL teachers, employers are unlikely to be prepared to pay for any travel costs to attend an interview.

Most language schools pay around £13.50 for a 45-minute lesson, but some pay a lot less. The German VHS – an organisation which is best described as a publicly subsidised evening school and probably the biggest employer of English language

teachers in Germany, pays about £11.80 in Munich and £12.60 in Augsburg. Berlitz, the largest private language school chain, pays between £6.75 – 10.00 depending on experience and qualifications.

If these rates sound good – think again! Freelance English teachers have to pay compulsory social insurance contributions to the German pension authority (BfA) of approximately 20% of their taxable income from teaching. The authorities will normally ask to see evidence that you are making these payments and have some form of health insurance before issuing you with a work and/or residence permit. These contributions alone will account for a good third of what is left after your expenses for teaching... and then you still have to pay tax!

Any EU citizen who wants to be an English teacher can teach here. There are no minimum qualification requirements; however, non-native speakers will find it much harder to find work, regardless of how well qualified they are. Some schools and training departments insist on working with native-English speakers only. Although not essential, it is best to get a teaching qualification (CELTA is widely recognised) before coming to Germany. You can do TEFL courses in Germany, but there are only a handful of centres offering such courses and getting a place on one can be difficult.

Non-EU citizens from the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand who want to teach should apply for a work permit from their local German embassy or consulate. You have to provide evidence that you have a job, i.e. a letter from your employer confirming that you have work, rates of pay and no. of hours. A lot of teachers from non-EU countries, come to Germany on a three-month tourist visa, find work and then apply to the authorities for a work and residence permit. Normally, the authorities will issue you with a temporary three-month work and residence permit which can be extended as long as you can prove that you have enough work and accommodation.

Finding affordable accommodation can be difficult. Most schools will probably leave you to sort that out yourself. A small 25m² (270 ft²) flat in a relatively expensive city like Munich will probably cost around £270 a month. It could cost half that in a smaller town or city.

According to a recent cost of living survey¹, a basket of goods costing \$100 in the USA would cost \$122 in Germany and \$140 in the UK. Eating out costs between £7-10 in your average restaurant and Germans like their meat – so vegetarians beware, far fewer restaurants cater for vegetarians than they do in the UK or USA.

If you are looking for a TEFL job abroad and don't really mind where you work, I would avoid Germany right now. I think teachers need to have a hidden agenda or strong personal reason to be prepared to try and survive as a TEFL teacher here. Still Germany does have its charms. The climate and the geography make nearly every conceivable type of sport possible. Culture vultures will find most of the larger towns and cities have lots to offer, and, of course, Germany is relatively safe – EFL teachers hardly ever get shot or robbed (probably because we're all too poor)!

¹Source: <http://www.expatforum.com/Resources/icol.htm>

John Sydes has been teaching English in Germany for over 20 years. He helps moderate a forum for English teachers teaching in Germany and runs a small team of EFL trainers in Munich.

Useful websites:

A bulletin board for English Teachers working in Germany
www.tefl-germany.de

General Information about Germany
<http://www.howtogermaany.com/home.html>

Information about Germany from the German Foreign Office (in English)
<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/willkommen/deutschlandinfo/>

Facts about working in Germany from the German Foreign Office (in English)
<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/willkommen/deutschlandinfo/>

Information about working in Germany from the US Embassy
http://www.usembassy.de/services/e33_13.htm

Information about living and working in Germany from the British Embassy
http://www.german-embassy.org.uk/living_and_working_in_germany.html

The BBC's Guide to Living and Working in Germany
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/languages/german/forwork/gettingthere/index.shtml>

Statistics on Germany from the Federal Statistical Office (in English)
http://www.destatis.de/e_home.htm

An egroup for English teachers living in Germany:
Send a blank email to:
germany-english-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Site where you can search for accommodation in Germany (in German)
<http://www.planethome.de>

Here is a link to an article about the pension problem which appeared in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in 2000. (One of the leading national papers here).
<http://www.faz.com/IN/INtemplates/eFAZ/archive.asp?doc={6DF9363D-9DE3-11D5-A3BB-009027BA22E4}&width=1024&height=740&agt=explorer&ver=4&svr=4>