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# Professional Development

## Taking the Cambridge DELTA in Japan

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This paper gives an overview of the Cambridge DELTA teaching qualification and relates the experiences of the authors in taking it in Japan. The different modules that comprise the Cambridge DELTA, course requirements and the different options for potential candidates working in Japan are outlined. The personal accounts and experiences of the writers, explaining the benefits conferred by taking the DELTA, are given, along with ways in which it has helped the writers' professional development. Particular reference is made to increased academic confidence and improved knowledge in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. Lastly, the article gives a realistic account of the time needed when undertaking the course modules and offers some advice on how best to manage the considerable workload involved.

本稿では、ケンブリッジDELTA教授資格の概要とこの資格を日本で受けた著者達の経験を説明する。ケンブリッジDELTAを構成する異なるモジュール、コース要件、日本で働く可能性のある候補者に対する様々な選択肢について概要を述べる。著者達の個人的な感想や経験はDELTA受講の利点を裏付けるもので、著者達の職業能力向上に役立った方法と共に提示する。特に、学術的自信の向上、外国語としての英語教育分野の知識の向上に言及する。最後に本稿では、コースモジュールの受講に必要な時間を現実的に説明し、実際にかかるかなりの作業負担を管理するための最善の方法について助言する。

The Cambridge Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (DELTA) is a practical qualification for English teachers that provides skills and techniques that aid professional development. It is a 60-credit qualification at Level 7 on the U.K. Regulated Qualifications Framework, meaning that the

content is at the same academic level as a master's degree (Lyons, n.d.).

There are a number of prerequisites for embarking on the DELTA. Candidates should be at least 21 years old and educated to bachelor's degree level. Requirements differ depending on the center providing the course, but in addition to a minimum of a year's experience in teaching English, a preliminary English teaching qualification such as a Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA or TESOL) is often necessary. Although being a native speaker of English is not necessary, those wishing to embark on the DELTA should demonstrate an expert command of the English language. Finally, we believe that it is beneficial to have experienced teaching at different ability levels and to have taught courses other than just general English (e.g., exam classes or academic English courses). This is because the DELTA requires candidates to draw on a range of past experiences when writing background essays.

The DELTA consists of three separate modules, which can be taken simultaneously or separately, in any order, and over any time period. In addition to a certificate for each module passed, candidates receive an overall diploma certificate upon successful completion of all three modules.

Module 1 (M1) is a theoretical course leading up to two 90-minute written exams that need to be taken at an accredited exam center. The exams focus on developing candidates' knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning English. This module covers theoretical perspectives on second language acquisition, different teaching approaches and methodologies, language systems and learners' linguistic problems, language and grammar concepts, key assessment concepts, and specific English teaching terminology. Whilst it is possible to take the M1 exam without having taken a course, we would advise against this route. Understanding how the questions need to be approached is critical, so taking a course that includes feedback from a tutor who has in-depth knowledge of the test format is the surest way to achieve success in the exam.

Module 2 (M2) focuses more on applied teaching practices such as lesson planning, the use of in-class resources, and managing and supporting learners. This module has four observed and assessed lessons, each consisting of a

background essay, detailed lesson plan, and the lesson itself. Of these, three are assessed by a local tutor, with the final one being observed by a Cambridge Assessor who will come to your place of work. In addition to the assessed lessons, M2 also includes a professional development assignment. This involves reflecting on your teaching beliefs and practices, and subsequently conducting related in-class action research. Finally, there's an Experimental Practice (EP) assignment in which you try out an experimental teaching approach, e.g., the Lexical Approach or Community Language Learning. The EP is supported by a background essay and a post-lesson reflection. Since the M2 includes a considerable amount of observed teaching practice, interested candidates should check carefully that using students at their current place of employment is acceptable from both ethical and commercial standpoints.

Module 3 (M3) provides teachers with an opportunity to pursue an area of specialism. This will either be an extended assignment on syllabus design, course planning, and assessment within English Language Teaching (ELT), or an extended assignment on ELT management. A broad range of specialism options are available, from the teaching of exam classes to the teaching of learners with specialist requirements, e.g., visual/hearing impairment. Thus, the module allows for candidates to focus on an area of specific interest within ELT. As is the case with M1, whilst it is technically possible to do M3 unsupported, we believe that it would be quite difficult to achieve a pass without feedback on assignment drafts from an experienced tutor.

## **Taking the DELTA in Japan**

One of the major advantages of studying the DELTA program is its flexibility, with a variety of study options available. The DELTA can be taken full-time or part-time and face-to-face or online with all versions of the DELTA leading to the same internationally recognized certificate. The teaching practice component of M2 usually needs to take place in a face-to-face environment, although due to COVID, as of May 2021 Cambridge Assessment is allowing this to be held in an online teaching environment or by remote assessment.

If modules are taken consecutively, it is possible to complete the full DELTA

Diploma in about 21 months. Whilst there is no officially recommended order for studying the modules, we feel that those adopting the modular approach should consider taking M1 first, as the theoretical grounding it offers will provide considerable support for the more practical elements of M2 and M3.

An alternative option is the blended DELTA offered by some training providers (e.g., Teaching House and International House). In this option, M1 and M3 are studied at distance, and M2 is taken as a full-time, face-to-face option over about six weeks. For Japan-based university educators, this option may be of interest, as M2 could be taken during the semester breaks. The face-to-face M2 option would also avoid any difficulty in finding a local tutor in Japan, which may be problematic depending on the candidate's location. However, since M2 is not currently offered as a full-time, face-to-face option within Japan, it would have to be taken abroad, thus incurring additional costs.

A further option, and the one that we both undertook, is the integrated program offered by International House (IH) comprising all three DELTA modules leading to the full Cambridge DELTA Diploma within a period of about nine months. This is called the Distance Delta. A prerequisite of this route is a pre-sessional Orientation Course (OC) taken either at IH, or a separate training provider. The locations of the OC change each year, but they have previously been held in Japan or in locations nearby, such as Korea and Vietnam. When taking the Distance Delta, a local tutor is usually required, who will provide help and support and will also observe three of the four assessed lessons. Candidates based far from metropolitan centers or working outside the British Council network may experience difficulty finding a local tutor, so an online option is available. Recordings of lessons are uploaded and watched by the online personal tutor, who gives feedback via Skype. The cost as of April 2020 was £450. The software for this is free and easy to install, though there may be some additional costs for the purchase of webcams for recording purposes. Those interested in the distance option should consult the Distance Delta website for details relating to the online option and also upcoming OC locations.

## **Our DELTA Experience**

We elected to take the Distance Delta via IH, since it fitted with our teaching schedules and provided a means to achieve the full DELTA diploma within a nine-month period. The program started in the springtime, allowing us to take the mandatory OC during the spring semester break, with one being held at IH in London and the other taking place at Melbourne Training Associates located in Melbourne, Australia. The decisions of where to take the OC were based on the proximity to family (in the case of London) and the proximity to Japan (in the case of Australia).

The two-week OC consists of four main components: seminars, teaching practice, reading and research, and web-based activities. Seminars cover a range of topics from different approaches to teaching to explaining the different DELTA modules. Course participants teach at least three developmental lessons which are observed by the tutors and fellow course participants. As such, it is useful for attendees to take some previously taught materials in order to avoid having to plan lessons from the ground up. Although these lessons are not graded, formal written and verbal feedback is given, allowing participants to consider areas of focus for M2. Additionally, attendees are shown how to conduct background research and given practice in essay writing in an appropriate register. This is important since the DELTA has some specific requirements for written work, i.e., a “semi-academic style”. As part of the OC, candidates are also introduced to the DELTA online library. This contains a vast number of articles that provide useful background reading and also help as part of the study for the M1 exam. Lastly, a thorough introduction to the course forum is given, and this is important as the forum is used extensively during the Distance Delta. Overall, we found the OC to be a useful and informative introduction, which provided a solid theoretical and practical foundation on which to build once we had returned to Japan.

The DELTA is notorious for its intensity, with the potential to “completely consume your life” (Williams, 2015, p. 7), and we certainly found the program to be challenging at times. Since all three modules were being taken synchronously, there was a relatively heavy course load, with regular coursework deadlines for the three modules that came on an almost weekly basis. However, there was a

very clear timetable and schedule of work to follow, and we felt that there was considerable support from the assigned online tutors and the local tutor based in Japan. For essays and essay plans for M2 and M3, a drafting process was provided, and both of us found this to be indispensable. The feedback from online tutors was excellent, and acting upon it was vital in passing all modules. Further support was available in the online forum, where our experiences could be shared with other candidates from around the world. This proved a good source of information, since drawing on others' experiences and perspectives was useful for us when conducting research for the written assignments. The program culminated with an intense period when the final assessed lesson from M2, the final piece of coursework from M3, and the exam for M1 all took place within 10 days of one another in early December. Unfortunately, this is unavoidable due to the rigid structure of the course, but we found that by diligently following the schedule of work, attempting to identify potential bottlenecks in advance, and keeping to all the deadlines, it was entirely manageable.

In terms of course fees, as of April 2020, the costs for the Distance Delta are quoted on the website as £3,310, equivalent to around ¥500,000. These costs include the overall course fee and the fee for the OC. However, it should be noted that additional costs will likely be incurred for international flights and accommodation and these will vary considerably based on where the orientation course takes place. Further costs could also be added to take the M1 exam at an approved center and to pay travel costs for the assessor who comes to observe the final lesson in M2. These additional costs could add a considerable amount to the total cost of the course and should be carefully considered prior to embarking on the Distance Delta.

In terms of time commitment, the amount of time spent studying varied from week to week, though it is estimated that it took a few hours most evenings, and part of each weekend to complete all of the coursework and prepare thoroughly for the assessed lessons. There were certainly some less intense times, though we recall that there was always something that could be worked on in any perceived downtime. Remaining aware of all the three modules of the DELTA and continuing to work on them in some way at all times helped to avoid any

bottlenecks later in the course.

## **Benefits and Advice**

Completing the DELTA has brought with it a multitude of benefits. For example, through studying for M1, our knowledge of phonology has improved considerably, and we feel better able to help Japanese learners with, for example, the finer points of connected speech. M2 helped us to plan better lessons, examine and question our beliefs as teachers, and encouraged us to try out new ideas in the class that have been of considerable benefit to our learners. Finally, our work for M3 has helped us to design and implement short courses related to academic writing and study abroad. We are pleased that we can apply both the practical skills and theoretical knowledge gained in their current context on a regular basis.

A further benefit is a growing confidence to contribute within departmental meetings at our place of work, as we now feel better placed to voice opinions on matters of pedagogy. We would add that the DELTA has contributed to a new-found academic confidence. Since completion of the DELTA, we have both published in several academic journals in Japan and internationally. Indeed, many of the benefits of the course were accrued some considerable time after the program had finished and continued up to the time of writing.

A final point to note is that since the DELTA is a 60-credit qualification at Level 7 on the U.K. Regulated Qualifications Framework, these credit points can be used as exemptions for parts of a master's degree program in the U.K. Both of us are currently using these credits to gain exemptions within an MA program in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) at the University of Sunderland in the U.K. The subsequent reduction both in workload and cost for the MA has been significant.

We feel that the nine-month Distance Delta is an effective way to complete the program within a manageable period. As we have noted above, however, the workload involved in taking the DELTA this way is considerable. If one chooses to pursue this route it would be prudent to clear one's schedule before starting, as there is very little spare time during the nine-month duration. Additionally,

although there is support from online and local tutors, this method would suit candidates able to work independently and adhere to strict deadlines.

If a more leisurely pace is favored, then perhaps splitting up the modules might make more sense. The other options outlined above would certainly provide a less intense way of approaching the DELTA. In particular, the blended option would provide significant support for M2, which we consider to be the most demanding part.

## **Final Considerations**

As has been noted in this paper, taking the DELTA can be relatively expensive and also an intense experience at times. Before deciding to embark on this qualification, potential participants should take the time to carefully consider a number of factors. Firstly, the online syllabus should be thoroughly read to ascertain whether the DELTA, with its mix of practical and theoretical challenges, is something that should be undertaken. Careful consideration should also be given to present working conditions to ensure that they are suitable. It is our opinion that candidates are implicitly expected to be working in environments that operate in line with the Cambridge English teaching ideals. For example, learners should be motivated, active, prepared to learn in an all-English environment, and possess a degree of learner autonomy. Whilst this may not present a problem for many educators in university settings, those working in contexts that follow more rigid teaching guidelines should check that deviations from the standard teaching methodologies employed are allowed. Finally, access to a digital library of English teaching books, alongside experienced, DELTA-qualified co-workers who can provide additional support and encouragement, would be extremely beneficial.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has given an overview of the Cambridge DELTA and has outlined our experiences in taking it in Japan. The modules that comprise the DELTA were outlined, along with various options for taking the qualification either face-to-face or online. We then went on to describe in detail our experiences in taking the



Distance Delta through IH.

In conclusion, the DELTA program's flexible framework offers a variety of ways to fit the diploma into candidates' busy working lives. Whichever method is used, we agree that, despite the intense nature of taking the Distance Delta, it has been an extremely beneficial and worthwhile undertaking. Overall, the Cambridge DELTA qualification comes highly recommended for educators in Japan who are interested in developing further professionally.

## **Useful Links**

For more information on the Distance Delta:

<http://thedistancedelta.com/>

For more general information about the Cambridge DELTA:

<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english/teaching-qualifications/DELTA/>

Sandy Millin's web pages relating to the DELTA are an excellent resource for those interested in learning more. It includes many firsthand accounts of DELTA experiences:

<https://sandymillin.wordpress.com/DELTA/>

To take the DELTA M1 in Tokyo, contact the British Council:

[exams@britishcouncil.or.jp](mailto:exams@britishcouncil.or.jp)

To take the DELTA M1 in the Kanto area, contact Language Resources:

<http://www.language-resources.co.jp/>

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