



Unlocking Letters and Sounds FAQs

Here we answer some FAQs, but please do get in touch if you have any queries that we've missed.

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What is Unlocking Letters and Sounds (ULS)?

ULS is a systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) programme that largely follows the progression of the 2007 Letters and Sounds framework. It offers everything schools need to deliver high quality phonics teaching from Foundation Stage to the end of the autumn term in Year 2, making it simple for teachers to ensure that every child quickly becomes a fluent and enthusiastic reader and writer.

ULS has been created by practising teachers who have used the 2007 Letters and Sounds framework with huge success for over a decade. We really understand its strengths – and are passionate about providing the resources and guidance to allow other schools to implement it successfully.

We also understand the day-to-day challenges teachers face. With this in mind, ULS has been designed to reduce teacher workload and ensure early reading best practice. It provides everything you need to ensure fidelity to one SSP programme and will give you confidence that your teaching is fully compliant with all recent guidance from the Department for Education and Ofsted.

Has ULS been validated by the Department for Education?

We're proud to say ULS has been validated by the Department for Education. What does this mean?

'Validation will indicate that a programme has been self assessed by its publisher and assessed by a small panel with relevant expertise, and that both consider it to meet all of the most recent Department for Education (DfE) criteria for an effective systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) programme' – Department for Education, 2021.

How is ULS different from the 2007 Letters and Sounds framework?

The main difference is that ULS is a full SSP programme that contains all the resources and guidance required to be validated by the DfE. You can see this from the table on page 3.

But in terms of our progression of GPCs and CEWs ('tricky words'), ULS matches the 2007 framework, as we firmly believe that this progression allows for children to be able to practice blending and apply their phonics skills rapidly. We have, however, made some minor updates to ensure:

- the progression meets the requirements of the Y1 National Curriculum (for example, the teaching of some suffixes is built into our progression at Phase 4)
- learning elements omitted from the 2007 framework are clarified and refined (for example, we clarify when children can read words with an -s ending)
- Phase 5 has a more precise progression

What does ULS include?

ULS includes everything schools need to teach phonics from Foundation Stage to the end of the autumn term in Year 2.

All our resources ensure fidelity to the programme and will support all staff, from ECTs to experienced members of a school team, to deliver high quality phonics provision.

	Included in the 2007 L&S Framework	Included in ULS
A progression for GPCs and CEWs	✓	✓
Daily lesson plans from the start to end of the programme, including pedagogy guidance for every phase		✓
Slides for digital whiteboards for every lesson		✓
Videos and written walkthroughs to exemplify lesson structure and pedagogy		✓
An action and image for GPCs in Phases 2 and 3		✓
A glossary to ensure consistency in language in all classrooms		✓
Classroom resources, including flashcards, mats and wall friezes		✓
Handwriting guidance and patters to support letter formation		✓
Assessment, both diagnostic and summative, and time-saving progress records		✓
Interventions to support the specific needs of all children – but particularly your lowest 20% (including those children in KS2 who have not yet secured their phonic skills)		✓
Guidance around reading so children are able to successfully practice and apply their phonics skills		✓
A collection of 225 decodable reading books (Phases 1 to 5) that offer progression on a week-by-week basis		✓
Models for guided reading and pre-prepared guided reading lesson plans and resources for selected titles (Phases 2 to 5)		✓
Support for Phonics/Reading Leaders, from advice on what should be put on your school website to observation and coaching records to help them support members of staff		✓
Comprehensive training packages that range from whole school training to in-school development days		✓
Videos to support training		✓
A bank of online lessons to use in the event of school closures		✓

How much does ULS cost?

We offer flexible and affordable buying options across the four different elements of ULS: the subscription (see below table), the training (see page 5), the resources (see page 6) and the books (see page 6).

In fact, the very minimum a school needs to implement the programme is a ULS Subscription (£300 a year – £250 for small schools) and online Whole School ULS Training (a one-off cost of £725).

But for the many schools who are keen to know how much the basics of each element of ULS would cost, a breakdown of our ULS Starter Packs, which bundle exactly that together, is below.

	One Form Entry Starter Pack	Two Form Entry Starter Pack	Three Form Entry Starter Pack
ULS Subscription Access to the heart of the programme – our user friendly online platform.	£300 a year (£250 for schools with less than 100 students on roll)	£300 a year	£300 a year
Whole School ULS Training A day of training to take all staff through the key aspects of ULS – plus three places at ‘open’ sessions during the rest of the academic year for any new members of staff, and access to our termly Phonics Leaders Network Meetings for your Phonics/Reading Leader.	£725	£725	£725
ULS Resource Pack Core flashcards, wall friezes and mats, professionally printed.	£200	£400	£600
ULS Guided Reading Pack 6 copies of 66 titles (Phases 2 to 5) to form your guided reading collection. Pre-prepared guided reading lesson plans for these titles are available on the ULS platform.	£1,386	£1,386	£1,386
ULS Independent Reading Pack Varied quantities of 204 titles (Phases 2 to 5) to form your independent reading collection. You get more of the titles you need more of and less of the titles you need less of.	£2,009	£4,018	£6,027
	£4,620	£6,829	£9,038

(Interested in our Starter Packs? They are a great starting point for getting what you need to implement ULS. To see a full breakdown of what you get in terms of resources and books, get in touch with Ransom Publishing on marketing@ransom.co.uk or 01730 829 091. They would also be happy to help you bespoke/upgrade a Starter Pack so it’s perfect for your school.)

Can ULS be used to support students in KS2, KS3 and beyond?

Knowing that, because of COVID, many more children than usual have not yet secured their phonics

knowledge (and that many children with SEND take longer to secure this knowledge), we have designed ULS so it can also be used with older students, ensuring our resources are simple, not too 'young' and easy for staff delivering interventions to use.

We are currently working with a number of junior, secondary and specialist schools – and we will be providing further guidance and case studies in the future. In the meantime, here are some practical things to consider:

- If you are a junior school, we recommend you try to use the same SSP programme that your partner infant school uses, as this will best support your students
- ULS needs to be delivered on a whole class basis – you do not need to set students by ability
- The daily phonics lesson will need to be delivered using an IWB, projector or (for a small group) on a laptop – the daily lesson slides cannot be downloaded

Can we trial ULS?

Absolutely! We offer a free no-strings-attached login to our online platform that will simply expire in one month's time.

This login will enable you to become familiar with all the resources ULS has to offer – and it will give you the chance to trial them in your classroom.

To claim yours, get in touch with Ransom on marketing@ransom.co.uk or 01730 829 091.

Who should I be sending my query to?

For questions about delivering ULS or training queries/bookings, you need us – the ULS team at St Peter's School. Drop us an email on uls@sppschoool.uk.

For questions about the ULS platform or subscription, resource and book queries/orders, you need our partners – Ransom Publishing. You can drop them an email on marketing@ransom.co.uk or give them a call on 01730 829 091.

What training is available?

To ensure we meet the needs of all schools, we have a full training programme available. This includes:

- Whole School ULS Training (in person or online) – this training is essential to ensure all members of staff understand the programme and deliver it with expertise and fidelity
- 'Open' ULS Training (online)
- Termly Phonics Leader Network (online) – this is free for schools who have accessed our training
- In School Success Day (in person)
- Phonics Leader Training (online)
- Assessment to Intervention Training (online)
- Book Matching/Guided Reading Model Training (online)

For more information and prices, head [here](#).

What classroom resources are available?

We have developed:

- Flashcards showing the graphemes met in Phases 2, 3 and 5a
- Flashcards showing the CEWs met in Phases 2 to 5
- Wall friezes for Phases 2, 3, 5a and the alphabet
- Wall chart for Phase 5
- Sound mats for Phases 2, 3 and 5
- CEW mats for Phases 2 to 5

These resources are all available to print for free from our online platform (accessed through a ULS Subscription) or, to save time, the resources are also available to buy, professionally printed, from our partners, Ransom Publishing.

For a full order form/price list, drop an email to marketing@ransom.co.uk or give Ransom a call on 01730 829 091.

Do your classroom resources feature illustrations?

Images are not used on any of our flashcards. This is to prevent children using picture cues, rather than phonics, to read GPCs.

The images that are associated with each grapheme are, however, used on our Phase 2 and Phase 3 Sound Mats and Wall Friezes to support early readers. (We do not use images on our Phase 5a Wall Frieze, as by this stage children should not need them.)

We also use images on our Phase 5 Sound Mats and Wall Chart (which show all the letters and sounds covered in Phases 2 to 5) to support Phase 5 alternatives.

Which decodable reading books are perfectly matched to ULS?

We know the importance of having quality decodable books that gradually introduce new phonics knowledge – and also foster a love of reading.

That's why we've partnered with literacy specialists Ransom Publishing.

Together we've developed their popular Reading Stars Phonics programme to support ULS, and also produced an invaluable 'Book Matching Chart' that aligns these titles to our progression on a week-by-week basis, so you can be sure you are giving your students books that precisely match their current phonics attainment.

We have also worked with Ransom to ensure ULS schools have access to flexible buying options (including easy-buy packs) at the superb price of just £3.50 per book.

For more information or help selecting the best book pack(s) for your school, don't hesitate to drop an email to marketing@ransom.co.uk or give Ransom a call on 01730 829 091.

Do we have to use the perfectly matched books?

Though we've not found any book programmes to be as precisely matched to our progression as Reading Stars Phonics (especially at Phase 5), we completely understand that some schools are not in a position to buy new phonics books.

As ULS largely follows the 2007 Letters and Sounds progression, you are able to continue using any books that follow that progression.

If you do find yourself in this position, Ransom have a number of small scale book options available, including bespoke packs to simply fill the gaps in your current collection. To discuss these, email marketing@ransom.co.uk or give Ransom a call on 01730 829 091.

Can we see some samples of the perfectly matched books?

Ransom are happy to send each school 18 Reading Stars Phonics books (covering Phases 1 to 5) that are completely free and yours to keep.

To claim your school's sample pack, get in touch with Ransom on marketing@ransom.co.uk or 01730 829 091.

Is there an ebook option?

Yes, digital versions of the books can be accessed through a Reading Stars Phonics Digital Library Subscription.

As well as the books, this digital library includes features like home logins and the ability to 'allocate' books to children so you can ensure that they're reading books that match their phonics attainment. The subscription costs are as follows:

- One year subscription – £300
- Two year subscription – £550
- Three year subscription – £775

For more details, get in touch with Ransom on marketing@ransom.co.uk or 01730 829 091.

Will, say, a class of 30 need 30 books available for home reading for every week of the programme?

No, you don't always need 30 books available every week (i.e. one for every class member), because not every child will be at exactly the same phonics attainment and children should only be taking home books that cover sounds they're very secure with (i.e. books they can read at 95% accuracy). So each week some children will be reading a title from earlier in the programme.

Also, the titles assigned to Mastery teaching weeks on the ULS Book Matching Chart draw on all the GPCs and CEWs covered in a Phase (the children have of course met them all by then), so these books can all be read at any point during Mastery.

(These two principles underpin the ULS Independent Reading Packs available through Ransom, which get you the minimum number of books you'd need to adopt Reading Stars Phonics for independent reading at

your school. For more information on them, email marketing@ransom.co.uk or give Ransom a call on 01730 829 091.)

Can titles used for guided reading also be used for independent reading?

Yes. This is based on current best practise research around fluency and automaticity. Children will meet some texts during guided reading while they're reading at around 90% accuracy (as they will be supported by trained staff), and then meet them again as home readers when they will hopefully be reading them at around 95% accuracy.

As explained in the DfE Early Reading Framework, re-reading texts builds fluency and automaticity for early reading. A video to help you explain this to parents and carers can be found on the ULS platform.

(This principle underpins the ULS book packs available through Ransom. The 66 titles in the ULS Guided Reading Pack also appear in the ULS Independent Reading Packs. To see a breakdown of the pack contents that illustrates this, email marketing@ransom.co.uk or give Ransom a call on 01730 829 091.)

When will your teaching resources be available?

The majority of our teaching resources are already on our online platform, but, as we are still in our first academic year, we are still finalising some – particularly our daily lesson slides. These will always be uploaded to the platform for when they are needed.

Does ULS cover Phase 1 and Phase 6?

ULS includes Phase 1 activities to support children who need this input. There are two activities to support each of the seven aspects covered in this phase, so 14 in total.

ULS also provides lessons until Christmas in Year 2, so many Phase 6 objectives have been incorporated into our planning. The other Phase 6 objectives will then be taught as part of your English lessons when you deliver the KS1 National Curriculum.

It's worth noting that while ULS is not a full spelling scheme, we do have longer term plans to develop a separate scheme to support the teaching of spelling in Years 2 to 6.

Does ULS provide a model for group/guided reading?

Group or guided reading sessions are essential to allow additional teaching and opportunities for staff to listen to children apply their phonics skills. These adult-led, small group reading lessons (using books that match children's current phonics attainment) will involve direct instruction from the adult and will provide opportunities for children to apply and practice their decoding, fluency, comprehension and prosody skills.

We know that every school has a different staffing structure and physical environment – all of which impact how they can deliver guided or group reading. To accommodate this, we offer several different models of delivering guided reading so that schools can use the one that fits them best.

We also offer the following:

- Pre-prepared guided reading lesson plans for selected Reading Stars Phonics titles, as well as

supporting flashcards

- A pre-recorded 'model guided reading session' video
- Training to help Phonics/Reading Leaders consider best practice in terms of guided reading at their school

Can we change the font ULS uses?

The font used across our resources – HfW Pre-cursive – cannot be changed.

It was selected because it is in line with the DfE validation criteria and the recommendations in the Early Reading Framework. It is non-cursive (none of the letters join together), but the cursive formation of the letter k and the lead outs/tails on some letters (o, v, w) support the move into cursive in Year 2. In other words, teaching children these formations prevent them from struggling to use them later on, when they do need to write in a cursive font.

Should you want to implement HfW Pre-cursive across any other resources in your classroom, it is free to download online.

Does ULS include handwriting guidance?

Handwriting is built into our daily digital lessons, and we supply simple handwriting patterns and visual guides to embed correct formation.

ULS, however, is not a complete handwriting scheme. We recommend that there is also regular 5-10 minute handwriting slots timetabled across the week, where children can practice handwriting under the guidance of a teacher so that they do not develop habits which are then difficult to undo later on.

When does ULS teach upper case letters?

ULS teaches upper case letters from the outset. For example, when you learn /a/ (Week 1 Lesson 2) you learn a and A. This means children are familiar with upper case letters right away (so they can meet them in their decodable reading books) – though they will not come across them massively until Phase 3, when they begin to learn letter names.

Does ULS include games?

As per recent guidance from the DfE discouraging the use of games as a vehicle for phonics practice, ULS does not include any games.

Does ULS use workbooks?

ULS does not have workbooks for children to complete. Instead, you will find daily writing opportunities in every phonics lesson, alongside transcriptional activities for children in the early part of their phonics journey. Then, as they progress, they will apply their phonics skills in writing in their English lessons.

Indeed, ULS has been designed to support teachers to personalise and adapt learning for children to precisely match their attainment – something a workbook cannot do.