

## Duncan Byrne

This is the last ISMLA Newsletter to come out under the Chairmanship of Duncan Byrne. His time in the position has coincided with an unprecedented increase in the association's involvement in national consultation over the future of modern language teaching and learning. Except - it isn't actually a coincidence.

Under Duncan's leadership, ISMLA has become recognised as the authoritative voice on behalf of the independent sector MFL lobby. A result has been that the crucial role of independent schools in the nation's modern language learning as a whole has been foregrounded and recognised by bodies such as QCA. The association's involvement in the Dearing review, our participation in the process of GCSE and A level revision and our chance to contribute to the debate over the question of severe MFL grading in public exams have all come about because Duncan has situated us at the heart of national MFL discussions. He has, somehow, proved well-nigh ubiquitous in the last four years or so. He has made sure that ISMLA has been known by and represented in practically every organ of modern language governance,

and has displayed a single-mindedness that makes him a tough act to follow.

Above all, Duncan has approached his work with an energy, professionalism and (not least) good humour that have made him a pleasure to work with. Demanding work as an Assistant Head at Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School, Elstree made it almost inevitable that Duncan would have to pass on the baton sooner or later, but we find it hard to think that he will disappear from the MFL landscape altogether. We thank him, for now, for all that he has done.

**Geoffrey Plow**

University College School



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*<http://www.goethe.de/ins/gb/lon/prj/pop/enindex.htm>*

# Chairman's Report

## Duncan Byrne

Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School

By the time you read this newsletter, the ISMLA Conference, which this year takes place on Saturday 24th January at Cheltenham Ladies' College, will be upon us. It has been extremely pleasing to see conference applications from a range of schools that have had no recent contact with ISMLA, and I hope that the day's events will live up to their expectations. I am delighted to be able to present a varied programme to delegates: reflecting the current popularity of 'Spooks', we welcome Judy Hodsdon, the Director of People and Information at GCHQ, which is just outside Cheltenham, to speak about Modern Languages and the Security Services; Languages ICT guru, Joe Dale, will present his 'Whizzo ideas'; as an antidote, James Stubbs will be resorting to our old friend, the OHP, to help him deliver 'Grammar through the Target Language'; finally, there will be language-specific sessions in the afternoon and the chance to hear about the CIE I-GCSE, which seems to be arousing a great deal of interest in the independent sector as we prepare to select our new specifications for September

2009. The conference promises to be our biggest yet outside London, and I look forward to meeting many of you in Cheltenham.

The conference will be my final event as ISMLA Chairman and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my ISMLA committee colleagues, who have been a source of great professional support and friendship during my time as Chairman. Their expertise and commitment has been vital to the association during changing times, and I am very grateful to them. Standing for election as ISMLA Chairman will be Nick Mair, Head of Modern Languages at Dulwich College. Many of you will know Nick through his pioneering work in Languages ICT as the author of the popular software for interactive whiteboards Games Box and Splatter! He has been heavily involved in national initiatives for some years, through his work with the London Branch of the Association of Language Learning, runs a variety of INSET events, and is a frequent MFL conference speaker. (Presuming that the AGM ratifies his proposed election), Nick will be supported in ISMLA's administrative functions by Geoffrey Plow, of University College School, who will become Vice-Chair.

I conclude by wishing you a very happy New Year and I hope that ISMLA will continue to enjoy your support under its new leadership.

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## Exchanges in peril

### **Duncan Byrne**

Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School

I would like to focus, in my final ISMLA newsletter as Chairman, on the threat to the traditional reciprocal exchange, as I believe that, if we value the exchange and wish to retain it, individual Modern Languages departments will need to fight to do so in the coming year of two. I am, of course, aware that many of our schools will have discontinued such exchanges in recent years, but the information I have hitherto received suggests that the reasons for discontinuation are more likely to be lack of pupil interest than burdensome risk assessment hurdles: our ever more risk-averse youngsters are too fearful of the possibility of finding themselves in an environment where they will be unable to communicate effectively or just plain bored. Many departments have explained to me that pupils don't want to participate in case they don't get on with their partner, and British

families' lives are 'too hectic' to host a foreigner for a week or two. Therefore, the short cultural trip has taken over in many schools, and pupils enjoy them hugely, although arguably more as a social experience than a linguistic one.

Until recently, I had not been conscious of independent schools ditching exchanges due to Health and Safety considerations. True, I have been wary for some time that the suggestion of CRB-checking all host families (home and abroad) would inevitably arise at some point, but in the last nine months, I have been contacted by numerous teachers in the independent sector concerned about the threats to their long-standing exchanges. These concerns either stem from new demands made by individual school management teams, or else reflect a significant announcement made by Children's Minister, Beverley Hughes, in June 2008. In a written ministerial response to a question from Liberal Democrat Education spokesman David Laws, Mrs Hughes stated:

"We expect UK host families involved in providing accommodation for foreign students in organised school exchange visits to undergo enhanced CRB checks."

Naturally, it is theoretically possible to ask host families to undergo CRB checks, but the extra time and expense that would be incurred make it likely that such a requirement would be the proverbial straw breaking the exchange camel's back. 'What about CRB checks on the host families in France / Germany / Spain?', our parents might justifiably ask. Again, I know it is theoretically possible to check a *casier judiciaire* in France, but can we imagine partner schools in societies where Health and Safety legislation is far less prominent persuading their parents that such intrusion is necessary to allow their son or daughter to travel to Britain? And how long in advance will exchanges have to be planned to allow such checks to take place?

Perhaps I am over-reacting. Perhaps in a few years, the obligatory CRB checks will have become as familiar as the pre-trip risk assessments. However, I fear that the requirement to subject our own host families (the legislation is seeking to protect foreign children in Britain, not our children when abroad) to CRB checks will sound the death knell of the reciprocal exchange. In a recent e-mail to the Linguanet web forum, Mr John Granger, Headmaster of Bournemouth School, wrote:

" ... in August 2007, ... our insurers insisted that all over-18s in host households must be CRB-checked. We have been running exchanges ... for over 40 years .... Since the insurer's change of policy we have had to stop all exchanges, as we cannot find a sensible route through the regulations ... Senior DCSF officials, politicians etc. ... all say that they think what has happened is barmy, but no-one has found a way out of the problem."

But is the CRB a requirement? Mrs Hughes' statement refers to an 'expectation': what does this mean? If schools take a variety of sensible measures to safeguard pupils participating in both legs of the exchange, would this be enough in the event of an incident? Clearly, I'm not a lawyer, but I have recently spoken to three heads of ISMLA schools, whose schools are currently offering traditional reciprocal exchanges, to see what a Headmaster's response to this would be. Having been explained the DCSF's recent statement, all three were determined to maintain current arrangements without demanding CRB checks, deeming them a disproportionate response to the actual risk. Inevitably, it will be up to the individual

school management team to determine whether it is more important to maintain current exchange provision for its linguistic, cultural and social value, or to submit to fear of the potential ramifications of not asking for CRB checks in the event of a problem occurring (note the hypothetical nature of the situation). In which case, the Modern Languages department will have to play a vital role in persuading management that sensible precautions have been taken to protect both our own pupils and the visitors. Initially, we need to brief fully partner schools about the context in which we work, which requires us to delve deeply into the family circumstances of the host families used abroad. We must check with pastoral leaders if there are any issues concerning our own pupils' families, when they are hosting foreign visitors. All families need proper briefing about their duties and responsibilities as hosts, and we cannot be embarrassed about asking colleagues in partner schools to ensure that the same takes place in their schools. Furthermore, lines of communication must be crystal clear to participants on both sides. Perhaps ISMLA could help to collate a guide to best practice in an attempt to prevent the demise of the exchange? If such arrangements

are in place, I sincerely hope that independent schools will resist the CRB 'expectation' to ensure that exchanges survive in the short-term. I and many colleagues are convinced that they are worth fighting for; the sanitised study trip or artificial 'château' experience may be great fun, but has but a fraction of the linguistic value of the traditional exchange.

## **ISMLA**

welcomes any  
articles, reports  
and other  
contributions that  
would be of  
interest to  
members.

Please contact  
**Peter Langdale**  
for further details  
(See inside cover for  
contact information).

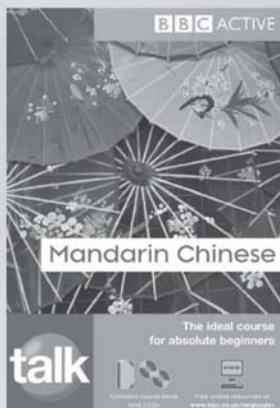
**Articles for the  
Summer Edition of  
the Newsletter  
should be with the  
editor by 1st May  
2009.**

# Talk from BBC Active

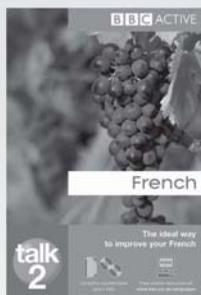
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- Free downloadable classroom activities available from [www.bbcactive.com/languages](http://www.bbcactive.com/languages) and free online resources from [www.bbc.co.uk/languages](http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages).

Available in French, Italian, Spanish, German, Greek, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese and Russian.



## Also available...



'The *Talk 2* series struck me as being of potential use for secondary language teachers, either in the classroom or as part of an independent study programme, perhaps using a multimedia language lab.'

– Duncan Byrne, ISMLA

Email [susanna.jones@pearson.com](mailto:susanna.jones@pearson.com) to

- Evaluate BBC Active languages courses.
- Request the latest BBC Active Language Tutors' Catalogue.
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[www.bbcactive.com/languages](http://www.bbcactive.com/languages)

# National Arabic Declamation Contest 2009

## Recite a poem or tell a story

Open to learners of all standards

~The best performances will be awarded prizes by a distinguished panel of judges

~ An excellent way for students to build confidence and learn about Arab culture

~ A great opportunity for students and teachers to meet their colleagues from other institutions and regions.

Date: **Sunday 1 March**

Time: 2.30 - 5.30 pm

Place: Eton College (Upper School building), Berkshire SL4 6DW

## How to take part

1. Pick any short Arabic text that you would like to recite. (The maximum length for each performance is two minutes.)

2. You can recite either as an individual or in a group. (There is no limit to the number of members in a group entry.)

3. Memorise the text and recite it to your teacher.

4. Your teacher can submit up to two entries (either individuals or groups) for each category (see below) to represent your school/college/university at the contest.

5. There will be two categories: Beginners and Open. See below for definitions.

6. Entry is through the school/college/university only. Individual entries will not be accepted.

7. Entries can be made via e-mail to [arabic@etoncollege.org.uk](mailto:arabic@etoncollege.org.uk)

The following information is needed:

(a) Name of institution

(b) Details of participants (names, ages, categories and whether they will be taking part as individuals or groups)

(c) Copies of texts that they will recite;

(d) The number of non-participants (teachers, friends, relatives etc) that will be attending.

9. The deadline for entries is 30 January 2009.

10 If you would like to receive a pack of suggested texts, please e-mail your request to [arabic@etoncollege.org.uk](mailto:arabic@etoncollege.org.uk).

## CATEGORIES

Beginners:

- Students not from an Arabic-speaking background who are at school/college and below GCSE standard.

- Students not from an Arabic-speaking background who are at university and in their first year.

Open:

- Students at school/college or university from an Arabic-speaking background.

- Students not from an Arabic-speaking background who are at school/college and of GCSE standard or above.

- Students not from an Arabic-speaking background who are at university and in their second, third or fourth year.

**All entries and enquiries to [arabic@etoncollege.org.uk](mailto:arabic@etoncollege.org.uk) by 30 January 2009.**

Andrew Hunt, as ISMLA Awarding Bodies Liaison Officer, is happy to act as a focus for communication for schools if they feel they have experienced difficulties over public exams at GCSE, AS or A2.

*If a school has made an official comment to a Standing Joint Committee, he would be especially grateful to receive a copy of the form sent, so that correlation of any trends across the whole ISMLA membership may be made easier.*

*Andrew is happy to respond at any time to any comment made by an ISMLA member school in relation to public exam matters.*

*Please keep in touch with Andrew at*

*[ajh@whitgift.co.uk](mailto:ajh@whitgift.co.uk), or via:*

*Andrew Hunt  
Whitgift School  
Haling Park  
South Croydon  
Surrey  
CR2 6YT*

*Telephone  
020 8688 9222*

## Updates

**Geoffrey Plow**

University College School

### New GCSE specifications

This is by way of a very brief indication that help is at hand in negotiating the differences between the new GCSE specifications in Modern Foreign Languages. Helen Myers, Past-President of ALL, has put together the following package of information that tracks what each board has decided to do in regard to each skill:

[http://www.all-london.org.uk/gcse\\_specs.htm](http://www.all-london.org.uk/gcse_specs.htm)

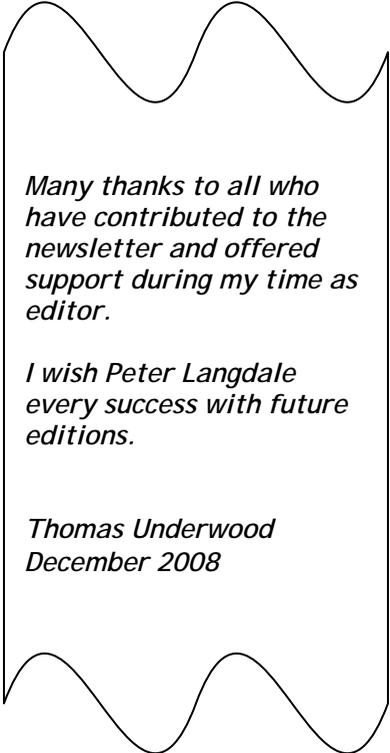
At the time of writing (22/12/08), important decisions have still to be made at QCA level about the nature of 'controlled assessment' in MFL. I am sure that this is one area that will attract a lot of comment at the annual conference at Cheltenham on 24 January 2009 - and expect to return to it in subsequent Newsletters.

### Inter-Subject Comparability

On 20 October, Geoffrey Plow represented ISMLA at an Inter-Subject Comparability seminar organised by Ofqual at Warwick

University. This was the first concerted attempt to broaden the debate on severe grading so that a number of subject communities might state their case in the same place at the same time. Helen Myers, Past-President of ALL, spoke on behalf of the MFL cause, and there were presentations in regard to English and Mathematics as well.

At the time of writing, no summary of the proceedings has appeared, but this will be available in due course through Ofqual ([www.ofqual.gov.uk](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk)).



*Many thanks to all who have contributed to the newsletter and offered support during my time as editor.*

*I wish Peter Langdale every success with future editions.*

*Thomas Underwood  
December 2008*

## **“How the internet is changing the way in which language exchange holidays for children are organised”**



It's been 15 years since the internet became a mass medium in the UK and the way we communicate has changed beyond recognition. The way we find and share information has been radically transformed. We shop, learn, travel differently. But the use of the internet does not lay only in its ability to secure information. We now use it to network, to create new communities of like-minded people and it is rapidly becoming our new social arena.

Lingoo.eu is a unique multilingual community website dedicated to language study holidays and language exchanges for children and young people. Combining holidays with the study of a language in the country where it is spoken is increasingly popular with European families

who want their children to become multi-lingual.

Lingoo is a simple and intelligent innovation of a tried and tested concept, and gives meaning to the study of a foreign language, by transforming what is often seen as abstract into a very real experience. Young people who stay with a host family gain motivation and confidence and, as a result, their language skills are significantly improved.

With the learning of a foreign language becoming compulsory at a younger age, the need for language exchanges for children is increasing. Lingoo.eu takes full advantage of the ways in which the internet is changing how language exchanges between families are organised. By creating a community of like-minded people and offering a direct approach to successful study-stays for children, Lingoo contributes to the development of communication across language borders. With this dedicated community website there is no need for a commercial third party to pair up families. Lingoo does not organise the stay, the families do. A year's subscription allows parents to make on-line contact with all other members and to publish their own language exchange offer.

In a situation where children are staying abroad the major success factor is mutual trust. This is where the Lingoo community comes in to its own:

- The website gives families control.
- Both parties exchange messages, photos, and details.
- Preferences are discussed directly, and trust is established.
- Families receive an evaluation from their guests.

Children are not sent on a holiday into the "unknown" and host families are not greeting a stranger; children leave home confident, already knowing something about their new family and what to expect.

Lingoo has recently developed a free service for schools who wish to help children organise individual foreign exchange trips, in parallel with any established school exchange. The Lingoo School Partner scheme "offers preferential prices to all children attending a particular school, and allows them to benefit from all of the advantages of a language holiday organised directly between families".

Safety is at the heart of the operation, as all families have to go through an identification

and security procedure, as part of a clear protocol which governs the registration process; Lingoo facilitates the creation of reference files, and confidentiality is respected.

Lingoo, launched in the summer of 2008, is rapidly expanding as an increasing number of European families join. Initially focused on French and English, paid-stay holidays and exchanges will soon extend to Italian, German, Portuguese and Spanish families.

No need to subscribe in order to search the family data base. A simple, short questionnaire is used to narrow down the options of family lifestyle, according to leisure interests, diet, values and beliefs. Lingoo allows you to perform your search first and to review the published offers from foreign families that match your criteria. If you are happy with the choice offered, registration is required before you can contact the families.

Lingoo facilitates the home stay by providing members with helpful tools such as sample letters, which are used to link up the families, a practical page, various useful links and a comprehensive "Frequently Asked Questions" page. The site also has a variety of sections to help with the organisation of

the exchange, such as Activities and Outings, Language courses, Transportation, Insurance.

Once families have opted for a stay abroad, parents need to decide what level of personal and financial investment they can commit to. A Lingoo language exchange, based on two families offering hospitality in turn on a reciprocal basis, works out less expensive than a paid home stay, therefore making good economical sense, although this option requires significant parental commitment. With Lingoo you can also choose a one way stay for your child with a host family. The selection process is the same and the host family is paid directly for the stay.

In both instances, the child is immersed in the country's language and culture. The language stay is tailor-made which makes for ideal learning conditions.

Written by Anne Goldstein, Director of Anglo French Media, publishers of [www.lingoo.eu](http://www.lingoo.eu)

[annegoldstein@anglofrenchmedia.com](mailto:annegoldstein@anglofrenchmedia.com)



## Language World 2009

University of Leicester.

*Challenge and change – grasping the nettle*

Friday 3 and Saturday 4 April 2009.

We have a very full and stimulating programme planned with a wide range of speakers from all sectors, special strands on the new secondary curriculum and community languages and a special event for adult education.

We are particularly pleased that for the first time in 2009 we'll welcome British Sign Language colleagues to a special Language World event.

Confirmed plenary speakers include Sir Keith Ajegbo and Terry Lamb.

For more information consult the ALL website ([www.all-languages.org.uk](http://www.all-languages.org.uk)) or contact Sheila James now on 0116 229 7454 or [sheilaj@all-languages.org.uk](mailto:sheilaj@all-languages.org.uk)



## **Lingoo School Partners**

**The Lingoo School Partner scheme offers preferential membership price to children attending a particular school and allows them to benefit from all the advantages of a language holiday organised directly between families.**

- **In your capacity as a teacher or parent, contact Lingoo and give us details of your school.**
- **After verification, Lingoo will add your school to our partnership page.**
- **The parents of school children who wish to benefit from this partnership contact Lingoo directly for registration.**

**Lingoo is a community site specialised in language exchange and paid stay holidays for children organised directly between families without the need for an agent.**

**[www.lingoo.eu](http://www.lingoo.eu)  
[www.lingoo.eu/school-partners.html](http://www.lingoo.eu/school-partners.html)  
e-mail: [contact@lingoo.eu](mailto:contact@lingoo.eu)**

## Ampleforth Spanish 6th Form Day

Gail Bruce  
Woodhouse Grove School

On 11 November 2008 - Remembrance Day - Ampleforth College, York, hosted its tenth annual Spanish Sixth Form Day. It was attended by over 120 delegates, both students and teachers, from ten schools and colleges from across the North of England.

After a welcome on the guitar, from John Mackenzie, of the Ampleforth Music Department, the day began with a lively and enlightening talk on 'España 2008'. The speaker, Chary González, is a regular contributor to our Day, and once again her talk was very well received. The second session was a talk on 'Dancing with Bulls' from Don Hurley. Don is a regular contributor to our events, and once again his talk was very well received from students and teachers. It was fascinating to follow Don's commentary on an 'indultado' from Enrique Ponce. ¡Olé! An excellent Spanish lunch was followed by sessions on Writing Skills, presented by Derek Bacon, and 'Los cantautores', presented by Francisca Garcia-Ortega of Ampleforth. Many useful tips were gained in these

sessions, in which students were separated into AS and A2 groups.

This annual Spanish Sixth Form Day is of tremendous value to both students and staff. Not only is it an excellent opportunity to acquire up to date knowledge from relevant experts but it also allows increasing numbers of students of AS and A2 Spanish and teachers to meet up to share and exchange ideas.

A big thank you must be given to ISMLA for sponsoring the Day, and to Authentik, OUP, Advance Materials and Hodder for their generous sponsorship of this tenth anniversary event with so many prizes. Thank you also to Ampleforth College for hosting the event.



**[www.cervantes.es](http://www.cervantes.es)**



# Beer Necessities for a German Year Abroad

Andrew Rose

Were someone to ask another if they would like the chance to take a year out from “normality” and experience another scene, another culture, a life that is hitherto unbeknown to them, the majority would jump at the chance. A depressed teenager, a school-leaver jetting off to the Far East on the clichéd quest of “finding him/herself” on his/her gap year, or a university student feeling that they have richly deserved a year’s break after three years of doing nothing, all long to escape the shackles of the mundane and lead a care-free existence for one year. This, in essence, is what a year abroad is all about. The difference being that it feels more imposed upon you, as opposed to free will. I don’t think any second year/going on third year German student feels wholly confident about embarking upon their year abroad, leaving the comfort of their surroundings and familiarity, but it is an experience which seldom comes about, and one which in hindsight, turns out to be one of the best experiences of your life! The following is an account of some of the things that I

have experienced and noticed during my one year stay in Stuttgart, and one which will perhaps sound familiar to those that have already spent a year abroad, and/or act as a little taster for what is to come to those who are readying themselves for it.

I have always maintained that the level of a German student’s language deteriorates between leaving school and prior to the year spent in Germany. The intensity of the A-level preparation, coupled with the “non-negotiable” school timetable, as opposed to the “turn up if you fancy it and are not hungover” university seminars and lectures, is the reason for this decline. All those rules that are drilled into German students at school seem to desert you as you disembark from the plane onto German soil. The only remedy for such fatal “language amnesia” is to immerse yourself into the life there, and nothing takes away the inhibitions or worries of making grammar mistakes than sitting down with a few Germans and trying out the language over a couple of pints of Hefeweizen. Making friends with the natives and being in speaking situations massages the brain into remembering, and as every good linguist-come-doctor will tell you, the “massage” will take a good

month to get the fluidity, both listening and speaking, back to a decent standard again. While this is happening the common symptoms include head-nodding, when some native decides not to take pity on you and is talking at some pace, if you're unlucky, in some dialect which is virtually incomprehensible, for example, the dreaded "Schwabisch". The head-nod has two purposes: one is to give the speaker the impression that you do in fact understand what is being said, and the other is to stop them using their perfect English on you. All Germans are itching to use their English, but one must not give into temptation, as you as a pair, will never go back to speaking German once the English language barrier has been breached.

At the beginning you will find yourself always listening to what people are saying, translating it into the English, whilst simultaneously translating the reply, and then giving your remaining concentration to not stumbling while speaking the reply. There will come a point during the year where this rather lengthy and long-winded process will become redundant, giving rise to a more orthodox way of communicating, which the good old Hefeweizen can't always

help with. Slowly the words coming out of the German's mouth make more sense before you've even had a chance to think about it, and it is at this point when one achieves the first stages of competency in a foreign language. The popular myth that the first sign of "fluency" is when the person in question dreams in the language that they are actively and passively learning, is maybe a little too black and white defined. The word "fluency" is something which I have great trouble with. Countless times I was confronted with the rhetorical question, "you must be pretty fluent by now", to which my response was always the same, "I don't really know"! At what point does one achieve "fluency" in a language? Is it simply being competent in dealing with all forms of the language? Is it perhaps being able to hold a decent conversation with a complete stranger on the bus? Or is it in fact when you yourself feel completely at ease with the language and all its peculiarities? Personally I believe in the latter of the three, with familiarity and ease being high on my list of priorities when speaking in German, and the feeling you get when you realise that you're at this stage of your linguistic development is one of great satisfaction.

It's not just the language barrier than one has to get to grips with when starting out on the year abroad. Although England and Germany are rather close geographically, the mentality and culture is surprisingly a gulf apart. German bureaucracy is infamous around the world for being well ordered, ruthlessly efficient and with few thrills, and coming from England, there is no other system which is more daunting (and vice-versa for German's experiencing the English system)! If you are intending on working in Germany, you must first "anmelden" at the local town hall. This seemingly unnecessary process is done to insure that you are in fact entitled to work and that everything is above board and in accordance with German law. Once you anmelden, you have to register with your local police station and this can't be done without proof of your registering at the town hall. Opening bank accounts is all dependant on the first two stages having been completed and having to go through the rigmarole of such epic proportions is rather trying, but one which ensures the smooth running of a community and is designed to make it impossible for anyone to cheat the system in any way.

Life at work in Germany is a little different to the one we're accustomed to in England. Everything is much more formal, and while dress-code has become more lax over the last few years, business conduct remains very much a thing of respect. High-ranking bosses address their subordinates as "Sie" and naturally this token gesture is reciprocated. First names are never used on the phone (unless one knows the speaker very well). Normally the formality of addressing each other as "Sie" is broken when the more senior of the two initiates and introduces the "du". Lunchtime in a German office is a rather strange concept. Apparently "lunchtime" is 11:30, a time of the morning in which one would find the average university student still asleep. "Shock to the system" doesn't adequately describe it and you will find that the term "brunch", strange as it seems, has never occurred to them. The formal conduct is not broken over a meal, even in more relaxed surroundings. This is to maintain the working relationship and to keep things in an ordered fashion. Moreover the canteens in the south of Germany serve beer at lunchtime as a refreshing beverage to appease the overworked employees. This would probably be abused by the English which is why it was

such an alien concept to me, but I have gradually grown to understand that it's not only a choice of drink in the south, but a whole culture for the average German worker. It is however difficult to even have one swift half with your boss in attendance, quietly judging you and mentally crossing your name out for prospective jobs in the company. While it may be the culture, it is the age-old question which has to be asked, "how many can I have and get away with?"

Finally the Germans love their festivals. They find any excuse to erect a beer tent, where tankard upon tankard is consumed at an alarming rate by people who would be coined as alcoholics, were it not for their high-tolerance and seemingly lucid state of mind. "Oktoberfest" and its counterparts is the perfect example of this. Oktoberfest is the celebration of a Royal wedding that took place in Bavaria almost two hundred years ago, and yet Germans find this a more than appropriate excuse to "saufen", whilst having not the slightest inkling, the reason for the festivities taking place. The "Canstatter Wasen", the world's second biggest Bierfest, is put on with similar intentions. To the best of my knowledge it has no story attached to it and is similar to

"Weindorf" in that when I asked a passer-by the reason for the staging of these festivals, he simply replied, "Es ist halt so!", thus proving the mindset of the Germans in the south. It is nevertheless great fun, and something which must be experienced in Germany!

As with all adventures, there are bound to be positives and negatives drawn from the experiences. It has, at times, been difficult to live in Germany; The Euro growing stronger making it more like expensive England everyday, the once renowned postal service showing signs of slowing down and German trains giving the National Express a run for its money in terms of delays and cancellations, all contribute to the slow morphing of Germany into a less ordered place. Added to which the sporadic pangs of home-sickness and a yearning to return home to friends, family, and yes, warm, imported beer make for an up and down sort of year, but the overwhelming feeling is of accomplishment and achievement of having stuck out a year in a foreign country, and returning home no longer seems like the finishing line, so much as it does embarking upon another year abroad and all the feelings that go along with it.

# ALL RUSSIAN ESSAY COMPETITION IN THE UK

## КОНКУРС СОЧИНЕНИЙ НА РУССКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ 2009

Students learning Russian at Schools, Colleges and Universities in the UK, including heritage learners and adult learners, are invited to participate in the Third National Russian Essay Competition 2009. The competition has been organised by the Russian Committee of the Association for Language Learning (ALL) <http://www.all-languages.org.uk>

The contestants will submit their essays by 14 March and winners will be announced by 30 April 2009.

Winners in each category will receive prizes and their essays will be published on the ALL website, in Rusistika journal and in Angliya newspaper.

The prizes will include

- cash (£100 for the top prize);
- theatre tickets to see a Sadler's Wells production "Pictures from an Exhibition" at

the Young Vic theatre in London;

- books, CDs and DVDs;
- 10 randomly selected entries will receive free tickets to the "Magnificence of the Tsars" exhibition at the Victoria and Albert museum in London.

We are hoping to receive a grant which would enable us to award winners in Category 3 free air tickets to Russia. All participants will receive certificates.

Please see the winning essays from 2008 on <http://sites.google.com/a/russian-teachersgroup.org/www/> and an article about the Competition in the latest issue of Rusistika journal, December 2008.

We hope that you will encourage your students to take part as this is an excellent way for them to compete nationwide with their peers in a field-wide event and to raise the profile of Russian at your institution.

If you are interested in taking part in the Competition please confirm your interest by 16 January 2009 by e-mailing Natalia Tronenko

[natalia@tronenko.com](mailto:natalia@tronenko.com)

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# Das Elterngeld - neue Familienpolitik in Deutschland

**Stefanie Gray**

Northwood College

Ursula von der Leyen ist seit 2005 Bundesministerin für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend. Sie war vorher als Medizinerin tätig und lebt mit ihrem Mann und ihren sieben Kindern in Norddeutschland. Als Ministerin und Mutter hat sie sich den Ruf einer "Superpowerfrau" erarbeitet und die Einführung des "Elterngeldes" ist ihr größter bisheriger Erfolg für eine neue Familienpolitik in Deutschland.

Obwohl sich die wirtschaftliche Situation in den letzten Jahren deutlich verbessert hat, sinkt in Deutschland die Geburtenrate drastisch. Besonders junge Paare, die karriereorientiert sind oder finanzielle Einbußen scheuen, gehören zu jenen Deutschen, die das Kinderkriegen häufig auf die lange Bank schieben.

Ursula von der Leyen setzte deshalb, trotz des Drucks durch andere Parteien und der Kirchen, die Einführung des "Elterngeldes" und den Ausbau von Krippenplätzen durch. Das "Elterngeld" ersetzt das alte "Erziehungsgeld" und gibt

Eltern die Möglichkeit, das erste Lebensjahr ihrer Kinder in finanziell gesicherten Verhältnissen zu Hause zu erleben. Hier sind die grundlegenden Regeln des Elterngeldes:

Alle Eltern, deren Kinder nach dem 1. Januar 2007 geboren sind, haben Anspruch auf 14 Monate Elterngeld

Eltern bekommen das Elterngeld zusätzlich zum Kindergeld

Das Elterngeld beläuft sich auf 67% des Nettogehaltes des Elternteils, der nach der Geburt des Kindes zu Hause bleibt

Das Elterngeld beträgt mindestens 300,00 Euro und maximal 1800,00 Euro pro Monat

Eltern können die Monate frei untereinander aufteilen, allerdings darf keiner mehr als 12 Monate Elterngeld beziehen

Familien, die bereits ein Kind oder mehrere Kinder haben, können zusätzlich einen "Geschwisterbonus" erhalten

Zum Ende des Jahres 2008 gab Ursula von der Leyen die ersten Ergebnisse des Elterngeldprojekts bekannt: Familien mit geringem Einkommen bestätigen, dass sie trotz Familienzuwachs keine

finanziellen Einbußen hatten. Erfreulicherweise nehmen auch immer mehr Väter eine Auszeit vom Beruf, um dank des Elterngeldes einen Teil der Früherziehung zu übernehmen. Zuletzt die beste Nachricht - die Geburtenrate in Deutschland ist zum ersten Mal seit Jahren wieder gestiegen.

Weitere Informationen gibt es unter

<http://www.bundesregierung.de/Webs/Breg/DE/ThemenAZ/Elterngeld/elterngeld>

<http://www.elterngeld.com/>

Webseite von Ursula von der Leyen: [www.bmfsfj.de/](http://www.bmfsfj.de/)



**See on-line for a range of  
resources and courses**

## **Per promuovere l'italiano si finisce ... in teatro !!!**

**Ernestina Meloni**

American School London

La compagnia Filodrammatica Il Circolo ha organizzato, con la sponsorizzazione di diverse compagnie italiane, uno spettacolo teatrale che è andato in scena a Londra nei giorni 9-10 e 11 ottobre presso il teatro 'The London Oratory'. L'evento, a scopo di beneficenza, ha raccolto soldi per borse di studio designate a giovani che vogliono studiare italiano all'Università di Oxford. La Compagnia Filodrammatica Il Circolo ha messo in scena la commedia di Fiorenzo Fiorentini 'Pensione Pomodoro' (libero adattamento e regia di Laura Marone Sansone) grazie alla ammirevole caparbia e dedizione di Lucia Casalino, Vice Presidente del Circolo, alla pazienza della regista Laura Marone Sansone e al coraggio di un gruppo di attori dilettanti (a parte uno o due attori di professione, di bravura encomiabile) che hanno dedicato mesi di prove accompagnati da una buona dose d'incoscienza ed un grande entusiasmo. Tra di loro c'era anche un'insegnante di lingua italiana, Ernestina Meloni, che ha dedicato una

gran parte del suo, già ridotto, tempo libero per poi esordire sulle scene londinesi regalando generosamente tre serate di risate e un pizzico d'italianità ad un pubblico incredulo, curioso ma abbastanza partecipe e caldo.,

Ernestina è responsabile di un progetto di lingua italiana per bambini presso la Scuola Americana di Londra. Ma da anni, oltre ad insegnare, organizza eventi e collabora con diverse istituzioni inglesi ed italiane, appunto per incentivare lo studio della lingua italiana soprattutto nella zona del sud di Londra. Tutte le tre serate sono state un vero successo e tra breve i nostri attori dilettanti partiranno in una tournée in Gran Bretagna, impegni di lavoro, permettendo.

La commedia di Fiorenzo Fiorentini, artista romano dalla grande versatilità, attore in almeno sessanta pellicole, doppiatore, sceneggiatore e persino cantante, ha una trama molto semplice che si snoda sapientemente sul tema dell'equivoco e racchiude la spontanea risata che tanto bene la commedia romana sa scatenare. Frattocchia è la padrona della Pensione Pomodoro, nella vita Mimi Monetto, più volte amata attrice di commedie de Il Circolo, con un passato da gallerista, che si trova a

licenziare per l'ennesima volta la sua cameriera dura d'orecchio interpretata da Lisa Genovese che, trasferitasi in Gran Bretagna proprio per amore del teatro, ora fa del teatro la sua professione. A sostituire la cameriera Pandolfa arriva Gianfranco Mandelli, che si cala perfettamente nella parte di Felice, il nuovo cameriere, balbetta alla perfezione e, grazie alle incomprensioni che ne derivano, viene scambiato a turno per una persona diversa dai vari ospiti della pensione. Gianfranco, pur vivendo a Milano, ha preso seriamente il suo impegno ed ha dedicato gran parte del suo tempo libero alla realizzazione di questo progetto. Ogni ospite, come molti dei personaggi creati da Fiorentini, porta con sé pittoresche eccentricità e tic che trasportano lo spettatore nel micromondo burlesco della Pensione Pomodoro. Arrivano in scena personaggi come Don Anselmo, Santuzza e Carmelina Patanè: padre, madre e figlia di origine siciliana rispettivamente interpretati da Silvio Zaccareo, Nancy Maugeri Zaccareo e Chiara Pernechele che presentano un mondo burlesco e ridicolo al limite della credibilità. L'impacciato Gualtiero, (Enrico Lampis), innamorato di Carmelina sul palcoscenico, nella vita oltre ad essere il segretario dell'Associazione Sardegna,

interprete e traduttore freelance, lavora nel campo farmaceutico. Non bisogna dimenticare la signorina Frizzi, Passaguai, aspirante attrice sempre pronta a recitare una parte, entra ed esce di scena creando ulteriore scompiglio, nella vita Marina Algeri, che vanta un passato teatrale a fianco di Paolo Villaggio. Altra ospite femminile, di non poca importanza è Simona Moretti che da Personal Assistant di Intesa-San Paolo si trasforma in audace signorina in cerca di marito. Inventore, costruttore e ora anche attore, Pietro Amati è in scena l'innamorato invadente e petulante di Sestina, facoltosa ospite della pensione, interpretata da Ernestina Meloni, che oltre ad insegnare è presidente dell'Associazione Sardegna 2000 che promuove la cultura sarda in Gran Bretagna. Recentemente Ernestina ha pubblicato un libro sull'insegnamento della Lingua Italiana attraverso il cinema. (per info. [www.edilingua.it](http://www.edilingua.it)). Come in ogni commedia non può mancare il dottore, interpretato dal ligure Roberto Binzonelli che da copione cerca di capire la delirante condizione in cui vertono gli ospiti della Pensione. Solo alla fine il cameriere Felice riuscirà a presentarsi come tale a tutti gli ospiti che festeggeranno intonando con il pubblico una

canzone popolare romana. Sotto la guida della regista Laura Sansone, il gruppo di attori ed attrici dilettanti ha dimostrato una tenacia ed un amore per il palcoscenico che li ha trasformati dopo nove mesi di prove in sale spesso improvvisate e di fortuna, in una compagnia teatrale vera e propria. Lo spettacolo che ha portato in scena è assolutamente ben congeniato e meritatamente applaudito e, per le tre sere in programma, ha riempito la platea e divertito tutti i presenti.



*[www.icilondon.esteri.it/](http://www.icilondon.esteri.it/)  
IC\_Londra*

# Reviews

## Edexcel French for A Level

**Robert Baylis, Christiane Salvador, Tim Swain**

Hodder Education  
ISBN 978-0-340-96863-5

It seems that choosing an examination specification nowadays involves looking at the authorised textbook that comes with it. The publishers had trouble in preparing new textbooks in time for the new A Level specifications, and Hodder's Edexcel textbook is thus a few months late. However, the delay has enabled a very thorough, attractive and multi-faceted resource to be produced.

The course relies heavily on the concept of Dynamic Learning, which is delivered through an extensive ICT learning platform. The teacher has resources to project onto IWB or a normal screen, while each learner has a student CD-ROM which gives access to a broad range of material to facilitate independent learning and revision. I have written this review shortly before the Dynamic Learning website has been activated. Therefore, although I can vouch that the platform is well-presented and

easy to use, I have not been able to look into the online resources in detail. However, the final product will contain a myriad of exercise types: grammar explanations can be consulted and exercises done and corrected online; exam-style practice materials can be used; interactive comprehension tasks are available; and audio and video clips can be accessed.

The author, Robert Baylis, is Head of French at Dulwich College, and I would say that the book has the mark of an independent school practitioner. There are hardly any of the mindlessly easy tasks in early AS chapters that blighted the Curriculum 2000 textbooks. Comprehension passages are very varied and literary excerpts are used frequently with demanding supporting questions. The book seems to be doing its best to appear 'hip': many passages are presented as e-mails, or blogs or web chat pages. I am rather doubtful of their provenance: the articles don't contain any of the poor grammar and spelling that one would expect from internautes. I was particularly impressed by the range of material available for the A2 topics, with which I have always struggled in the past. The resources found to explore the topics of les marginalises, le

clonage, l'avortement etc. are challenging and interesting without being excessively dense; as one currently teaching the legacy Edexcel specification, I would jump at the chance of using these texts with my current Upper Sixth pupils.

I will try to update this review on the ISMLA website [www.ismla.co.uk](http://www.ismla.co.uk) when the Dynamic Learning resources have been made available. However, this seems to be an impressive new A Level course and, if I were teaching the Edexcel syllabus, it would certainly be my first point of call.

**Duncan Byrne**

Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School

**Potential Reviewers!**

Are you keen to review any new material that we receive from publishers (reviewers may keep the resource for the department)?

If the answer is "yes", please contact Patrick Le Berre or Peter Langdale.

**Through Russia...with love**

**Natalia Veshneva**

Melrose Publishing

ISBN 978-0954051532

The availability of Russian textbooks is limited, and those which are modern and geared towards beginners are even more difficult to find. "Through Russia...with love" does, however, provide almost everything you need for a complete and enjoyable beginners course in Russian, so don't be put off by its title.

The textbook is divided into 12 chapters and these are in turn divided into shorter lessons. The vocabulary and grammar of each lesson is introduced by the three main characters of the textbook through a dialogue. As the title suggests, the characters supposedly take you on a journey through Russian culture and life, and whilst there are some realistic and sometimes amusing references to this, I think that the strength of this book lies in its variety of exercises which do indeed support the storyline. It is clear that the author is in tune with the demands of UK examination boards and has therefore created a book which ensures that there is a good balance between the four skills. Pupils

mentioned their enjoyment at being able to complete all of the exercises (except the longer written pieces) in the book itself!

Grammar explanations are regular and clear, and there is also a Grammar reference section which summarises these. The textbook is accompanied by 4 CDs which have recordings of the dialogues and listening comprehension exercises, as well as some songs. Depending on your group and their musical tastes, they may or may not like these!

The pace of this course is brisk but clear. Russian textbooks are unfortunately not in the same league as some of the more mainstream modern language resources, but this is the closest I've come to finding one.

**Alicia Sanchez-Blanco**  
University College School

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## COMPETICIÓN DE DEBATE EN ESPAÑOL KING ALFRED SCHOOL

El departamento de español de King Alfred School, invita a todos los colegios con Sixth Form a participar en una competición de debate en español. La competición de debate en francés, organizada por Highgate School, lleva organizándose durante varios años y ha demostrado ser un éxito, tanto como práctica para el examen oral de A2, como siendo una gran fuente de motivación para todos los alumnos participantes.

El precio para la pareja ganadora es un curso de una semana en la escuela de español Mester en Salamanca. Para más detalles manda un email a Eva Sánchez a:

[evas@kingalfred.org.uk](mailto:evas@kingalfred.org.uk)



# ISMLA National Conference

*Sat 24th January 2009 - Cheltenham Ladies' College*

9:45 - Registration and coffee. Exhibition opens

10:30 - Welcome by Mrs V. Tuck, Principal

10:45 - James Stubbs, St Philomena's School, Carshalton, Teaching Grammar Through The Target Language: Mission Impossible?

11:45 - Annual General Meeting

12:00 - Coffee served in the exhibition area

12:30 - A choice of sessions

Judy Hodsdon, Director of People and Information, GCHQ

Modern Languages and the Security Services

or

Cambridge International Examinations

The I-GCSE in Modern Languages

13:15 - Lunch followed by coffee in the exhibition area

14:45 - Language specific sessions

German - To be confirmed

Spanish - Prof Christopher Pountain, Queen Mary's, University of London

French - Mr Pierre Pillet, Sevenoaks School

Claudel et Rodin : histoire d'art-mour

Chinese - Cheltenham Ladies' College

15:45 - Joe Dale, Nodehill Middle School, Isle of Wight

Whizzo ICT ideas for Languages teachers

16:45 - Tea and departure