

Chairman's Report

Duncan Byrne
Whitgift School

It is with a slight air of nervousness that I commit (virtual) pen to paper for my first ISMLA Chairman's letter, as I take over at the helm of an Association in a rude state of health. Richard Hoare stepped down following an excellent conference at Merchant Taylors' School in North London after three tremendously successful years, during which time the profile of ISMLA has been enormously enhanced. Richard has been instrumental in forging strong working relationships with the other national organisations representing language learning, and it is due to his influence that ISMLA is now able to collaborate on projects with CILT and ALL, and to have a voice in fora such as the Languages Alliance. Richard has also managed to assemble a dynamic committee representing schools across the country and he will be much missed, both professionally and personally.

The committee was delighted to see representatives from so many independent schools at our Annual Conference at Merchant Taylors' School on Saturday 5th March, although we apologise to those members who could not be accommodated after we reached

our limit. It was very pleasing to see 140 delegates (confirming the healthy upward trend of the past three years) enjoying a variety of presentations, led by our Keynote Speaker, Barry Jones, the current President of the Association of Language Learning. ISMLA owes a huge debt of gratitude to Mr Peter Langdale, Head of Modern Languages at Merchant Taylors' School, for his indefatigable work in preparing the conference. Thanks must also go to the host Modern Languages department for their help in leading Language Laboratory Sessions and for sundry other organisational tasks, without which the day would have run much less smoothly. Following two consecutive conferences in North London, the ISMLA committee has decided to leave the capital for our conference next year, of which more details will be available in the Autumn term edition of the newsletter.

This term, I would like to welcome most warmly Mr John Ridge, Head of Modern Languages at Ampleforth College, to the ISMLA committee. He is taking over from Astrid McAuliffe as Membership Secretary and schools will shortly be receiving their membership renewal forms

from John. We are extremely grateful to Astrid for her sterling work over a number of years in this role. She has done much to enhance the smooth running of the Association by developing the ISMLA database, and we are very pleased that she will be remaining with the committee as the regional representative for the South-East.

Language learning continues to be in the news, and not always for positive reasons. Recent statistics from the University Council of Modern Languages show a 15% drop in the number of languages undergraduates since 1999, at a time when student numbers have generally been increasing. The effects of the government decision to make languages optional in KS4 have also been widely reported. Interestingly, independent schools seem to be bucking these trends at present, and although we must be on our guard in order to ward off any 'drip-down' effect from the maintained sector, we should also seek to celebrate what we are able to offer, in terms of range of languages taught, exposure to foreign cultures, and imaginative initiatives, both within and outside the curriculum.

Finally, I would like to bring your attention to two developments, on which we would like to hear your views. Firstly, Dr Geoffrey

Plow of University College School, our Examinations Officer, is collating complaints about examination board anomalies, which frustrate many of us, particularly at results time. Schools often find that individual complaints receive only unhelpful formulaic written responses from the awarding bodies, and we would therefore like to encourage members to pass on details of your complaints to Geoff (contact details at the front of this newsletter), so that ISMLA can pool together a body of evidence with which to confront subject officers where appropriate. Secondly, ISMLA has received comments from a number of member schools concerning Common Entrance French over the last few years. Following a recent meeting with two ISEB languages examiners, we have been reassured that some of the issues (e.g. huge gulf in difficulty between papers 1 and 2) are being addressed. Inevitably, considerable differences of opinion between secondary and preparatory schools remain over the content of the French CE examination, and I would therefore like to encourage you to participate in a consultation exercise, which the ISEB will be launching imminently, concerning the post-2007 future of Common Entrance. If the concerns expressed by some secondary schools are held more widely, then this is the

opportunity for the voice of the independent secondary sector to be heard.

It therefore remains for me only to wish you a successful Summer Term, and a restful recharging of batteries beyond!

Nihongo Cup

The JLC Japanese Speech Contest for Secondary Schools, scheduled for 23 April, is co-organised by the Japanese Language Committee of the Association for Language Learning, the Embassy of Japan and the Japan Foundation. The contest is open to pupils aged between 11 to 19 who will be giving speeches on the theme of Friends to an audience of teachers, friends and parents. For further information, contact the Project Manager Caroline Lewis on cml@japanesematters.co.uk or by calling 020 7379 3934. Go to <http://www.jpff.org.uk/language/setnews.html> and click on 'Mado Vol. 20' to read about last year's speech contest.

The fact that Japanese resources for the UK market have been scarce - most teachers use Australian textbooks - has had a positive effect on UK teachers of Japanese in inspiring them to produce their own. Sharing them through an e-mail discussion

group helped to build teachers' confidence and the quality of teaching enormously. A wide range of useful resources is available through the JFLLC's website <http://www.jpff.org.uk/language/setteachres.html>

Without a doubt, one of the most sophisticated Japanese resources to date has to be 'Tobu', an online resource produced by the BBC, with advisory input from the JFLLC. Tobu was originally designed for KS3 students, but has proved to be popular with younger and older pupils alike. Without ignoring the vital role of the teachers: this is the resource if you want to combine ICT and Japanese language learning, the award winning Tobu stands out from the range of current ICT resources. For more information and to register and obtain a password for the site (www.bbc.co.uk/ks3japanese) contact JFLLC Japanese Language Advisor Rochelle Matthews at Rochelle.Matthews@jpff.org.uk. Last but not least, the video 'Class Acts - Success Stories from the UK Japanese Classroom', produced by the Japan Foundation, is filled with examples of good practice and continues to serve as an invaluable teacher training tool as well as providing schools interested in setting up Japanese with many useful ideas.

SUPPORTING DYSLEXIC LEARNERS WITHIN A MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT

Robyn Spencer

Director of Learning Strategy & Support

University College School

Dyslexic learners' difficulties show up most clearly when learning foreign languages. This is not to say that they cannot achieve a good deal of success in language learning. The severely dyslexic will need to follow specially devised programmes to meet with any degree of success, but mild to moderate dyslexia can be accommodated within normal classroom practice, provided that the teacher has an understanding of the difficulties and the pupil is willing to put in some extra time and effort.

To understand dyslexic learners' difficulties, teachers need to be fully committed to the idea that strong reasoning skills and good conceptual ability can coexist with weakness in a range of the 'microskills' required for efficient learning. These microskills are the underlying abilities which, when clustered together, form aptitudes for particular areas of learning. The cognitive weaknesses shown in a

typical dyslexic profile can be related directly to the skills needed for language learning.

Weak auditory discrimination (in many cases attributable to ear infections in early childhood) makes it hard to hear crucial differences between similar sounds, to sense accent and stress, to break words up into syllables and to hear when one word ends and another begins. Weak visual perception creates problems with accurate reading, scanning for text endings, finding errors when checking work, using a dictionary and accurate copying. Memory and sequencing weaknesses create particular difficulties with learning verb conjugations, absorbing new vocabulary and coping with changes in word order when structuring sentences. Hand-eye co-ordination weaknesses mean that accurate copying, clear layout, effective note-taking and general legibility can also be affected.

One can appreciate the impact that one, let alone a combination of the above difficulties may have upon language learning, with its requirements for precision and accurate retention. The pupil may appear to lack concentration and motivation and be careless, lazy and disorganised - and all these things may apply, but are probably secondary to the underlying difficulties. For skills

to become automatic, dyslexic pupils need a great deal more rehearsal than their peers. Without automaticity, the kind of vigilant multi-tasking required to interpret or express oneself in a foreign language is beyond reach.

The first principle to follow when teaching dyslexic learners is to consciously make teaching and learning multisensory - integrate hearing, seeing, saying and writing. Using one, or even two, learning channels at a time is not sufficient for the dyslexic learner. Strengthen the message by ensuring that information is absorbed by using all four of these learning modes and, wherever possible, use role-play, actions and gestures as well.

Secondly, use metacognitive approaches - in other words involve dyslexic learners in an ongoing dialogue about how they learn best. Discuss routines for vocabulary learning - Do sorting activities help? Have they tried using colour or drawing pictures and doodles? Do they use mindmaps? Can they describe their learning routine? Do they try to learn silently? Discuss also ways of getting to grips with verbs and how to overcome difficulties with dictionary use.

Thirdly, make them aware that 'overlearning' (reinforcing and reviewing what has previously been learnt) is a crucial part of

the learning process. Although most teachers work to a schedule that maximises memory efficiency, it is important that the pupils themselves are aware that this is the secret of transferring information from short-term memory into long-term memory. Once information is in the dyslexic's long-term memory it will be secure, but pupils themselves need an appreciation of the steps necessary to secure the learning. Help them to set realistic targets and challenge them to improve on previous performance, without implying that their current performance is inadequate.

Finally, there are compelling reasons for encouraging dyslexics to use IT for language work: mistakes are easier to spot and pupils are more willing to attempt to correct their own work; templates can be set up to help learn vocabulary and verbs; dictionaries and thesauruses become accessible on computers and activities to support the additional practice required for mastery of concepts can be accessed on-line.

The approaches outlined above will undoubtedly help dyslexic learners to enjoy a degree of success in learning a foreign language, provided they are implemented before the learner has experienced too much difficulty and decided to switch

off. They can be applied to whole classes and will benefit many non-dyslexic learners along with dyslexics.

The "Shoot-out Challenge"



In partnership with the German television station ZDF and their 30-year-old sports programme "Sportstudio", the Goethe-Institut London creates a new and exciting sports and language campaign for schools and businesses in the UK.

"Die Torwand" is part of the ZDF Sportstudio, broadcast every Saturday night in Germany. The show focuses on interviewing football and sports celebrities and culminates with guests taking a 'shoot-out challenge'. Participants have 6 attempts to kick a football through two circular openings on an erected goal - with 3 chances on each hole.

From April 2005 onwards, schools and local education authorities are invited to participate in the "shoot-out challenge".

Schools are to register with the Goethe-Institut London, whereby we will arrange a date for the

goal to be sent to you. With this date together, we will organise a special language and sports day with taster lessons, ICT workshops, films and potential visits from recognised German footballers (Robert Huth, Jens Lehmann, Didi Hamann, Moritz Volz etc).

Ideally the "shoot-out challenge" will coincide with Option Days, Parent Evenings, Language and Career Days.

The use of the goal will follow similar guidelines as that of the ZDF television programme and each pupil will have six shots in total on the goal (three on each hole in the wall). Supervising teachers will keep score sheets and prizes will be handed out at a schools ceremony at the end of the day.

As the "shoot-out challenge" travels throughout the UK, results of pupils' performances will be collated and published on this website. The competition will end in June 2006 with a culminating end-competition between the best pupils.

To register interest in the "shoot-out-challenge" please mail Oliver Benjamin
benjamin@london.goethe.org

ISMLA Conference 2005 reports

**“It makes you think;
creating engagement
and offering
challenges.”**

Evelyne Maynard
Lochinver House School

The annual ISMLA Conference took place at Merchant Taylors' School on 5 February and started with an entertaining and thought-provoking presentation by Barry Jones, President of ALL and Lecturer in Education at Cambridge University. Barry's talk was warmly received; and at the end, because he had illustrated his points so richly, we all had something to take back to our classroom. I've included many of his examples in my summary.

Do you ever get the feeling that you're all 'singing-and-dancing' and that not enough is heard from your pupils?

Next time you ask your class to repeat something, check how many pupils actually repeat what you're trying to teach them.

OK, choral repetition is safe and doesn't expose those pupils who are inhibited; but many do not repeat and that's when disengagement takes place. If

you want them not to feel embarrassed, pair them off, get them to whisper the answer to each other, and let one of them then say the answer aloud.

We all know that saying something twice is not sufficient to commit it to our long-term memory – but on the other hand saying it more frequently becomes boring.

So you need to add another element. Create categories. It promotes thinking skills and you get your repetition! The quality of your pupils' listening will be greatly enhanced if they know that they have to sort the new language into different categories.

When you invent those categories, why not consolidate grammar, pronunciation, spelling and at the same time reinforce literacy links?

Ces mots sont masculins ou féminins ?

Donnez-moi des mots d'une lettre, d'une syllabe / de deux / trois...

On prononce ou ne prononce pas la dernière lettre ?

C'est au singulier ou au pluriel ?

You can also make the learners associate the language with

something other than language. Ces animaux, ils mangent des plantes ou de la viande? C'est bon ou mauvais pour la santé?

They need to go beyond the mundane and mechanical and be creative and imaginative. The unpredictable makes them listen. Faites une phrase avec 'et', 'mais', 'en plus', 'puis', 'aussi', 'parce que', 'donc', 'cependant'...

Topics (words, words, words...) are not transferable, so your learners need to build up language complexity at an early stage. They need to express opinions – C'est absolument nul ! C'est vraiment cool! C'est très chouette! C'est peut-être un peu ennuyeux! C'est vraiment bizarre!

Teachers need to develop a whole range of meaningful responses to the content of their pupils' contributions. And here we are not talking about saying excellent to a young learner who has just managed – J'ai un frère et deux soeurs. After all, why is it excellent to have a brother and two sisters?

Instead try responding to individuals with Vraiment? Ce n'est pas vrai? Tu es sûr? Tu es certain? and to the class with Qui est d'accord ? Tout le monde est d'accord? Je ne suis pas d'accord et toi ? Create thinking time.

Wait. Don't approve the first thing you hear. Collect answers.

Give an element of choice and independence. Let your pupils bring or find the photos, the cartoons or the paintings you are going to use in your lessons. Let them choose their reading materials.

Make sure they learn how to learn, to memorize, to check work and to write interestingly. Let them say how they learnt their homework. Make the strategies explicit.

When you want accurate spellings to be learnt, get your pupils to think. Mask the bottom half of the word, slowly hide words or letters on the screen, use stars instead of letters, show a mirror image of the word or the word upside down or back to front.

Articles for the
Autumn Edition
of the Newsletter
should be with
the editor by
Monday 29th
August 2005

Update on the Development of the Languages Ladder

Duncan Byrne
Whitgift School

The second speaker of the morning was Kate Green, the Project Director of the *National Recognition Scheme for Languages*, or the *Languages Ladder*, as it is informally known. The creation of a recognition scheme for languages (similar to the *Associated Board* music examinations) was one of the three overarching aims of the National Languages Strategy, *Languages for All: Languages for Life*. This scheme will make it much easier for learners to receive accreditation for achievement in language skills at all levels of competence and will give them a pan-European qualification through cross-reference with the Common European Framework.

The Languages Ladder is made up of 17 *grades*, divided into six examinable *stages*, ranging from *Breakthrough* to *Mastery*. There are 'cando' descriptors for each skill at each grade, allowing learners and teachers to plot progress in a language, without necessarily seeking accreditation. Learners will, however, be able to sit language examinations at the end of each *stage* in

individual language skills, enabling them to be credited for ability in spoken language, for instance, even if they are unable to write the language.

Language Ladder stages	NC levels	General qualifications
Breakthrough: grades 1-3	1 - 3	Entry Levels 1-3
Preliminary: grades 4-6	4 - 6	Foundation GCSE
Intermediate: grades 7-9	7 - EP	Higher GCSE
Advanced: grades 10-12		AS / A / AEA
Proficiency: grades 13-15		
Mastery: grades 16-17		

UCLES has been awarded the contract to develop the Languages Ladder assessment models and several features are being piloted (since September 2004) including:

- Teacher assessment within each stage
- Use of online testing, enabling learners to be tested when convenient for them
- Standardised material across languages

Inevitably, the question may be asked 'why do we need the Languages Ladder?' At present, it is felt that languages qualifications are far from being inclusive. Accreditation for

achievement in individual skills will enable more learners to give evidence of language ability. Formal assessment of KS2 pupils in the **Breakthrough** stage will help the transition into secondary education, and the **Preliminary** stage will enable pupils who give up a language at KS3 to take forward a qualification, on which they may be able to build later in life.

Although the increased burden on teachers involved in assessment of the Language Ladder modules gives cause for concern, the initiative is one that will have increasing significance over the coming years. Some independent schools have been involved already in the pilot, and the new academic year will see the national rollout of the first three stages in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Panjabi and Urdu. The remit of the Languages Ladder is, however, much more ambitious than merely these first eight languages, and ISMLA thanks Kate Green for giving up time in her busy schedule to update us on the progress of such an enormous project.

***Die Wende*, 'Poems that captured the spirit of reunification: three practical suggestions for the sixth form.'**

Geoffrey Plow
University College School

Peter Hutchinson's talk on East German poets' reaction to the 'Wende' in and around 1990 offered an attentive audience an insight not just into the sensibilities and the reactions of creative writers at a time of political change, but also a valuable primer in the introduction and explication of poetry with sixth-form classes. Dr Hutchinson did not regard poetry as 'too difficult' for A level German classes. On the contrary, he showed that a double period would probably be sufficient to handle an individual poem - which would give a class a real feeling of success: they would have 'done' a work of literature from top to bottom.

Dr Hutchinson chose Volker Braun's 'Das Eigentum' and 'O Chicago! O Widerspruch!' (both 1990) to develop his thesis that our understanding of the East German reaction to unification gains much from an examination of the poetry written at the time. Poetry was, Dr Hutchinson said, after all a medium where insights gained and formulated in the morning could be published in a

newspaper the same evening. The reactions expressed were instantaneous in a way not matched by West German writing.

Dr Hutchinson did indeed also discuss a piece by a writer who had operated in the old West Germany. Examining 'Das Unserer' (1993) by Günter Grass, he showed us how humour, playfulness and a sheer range of emotions were quite possible in poetry which might, at first sight, be considered severely 'political'.

It was as if comedy allowed an expression of something which audiences would have found hard to take otherwise. Dr Hutchinson finished his talk by considering whether the contemporary references in the poems might be too ephemeral, their treatments of situations too direct to allow them to function for future readers without a battery of footnotes.

Whatever may happen to these works in the future, however, we were all delighted to have the opportunity to hear about a type of literature (and, by association, a type of teaching) which had real potential for inspiring learners to go on and read more - which is, no doubt, what some of the audience on 5 February did, straightaway.

“Modern Languages: a rehearsal for something which will never happen.”

Exams Forum

P R J Ellis
Felsted School

In recent journals and at our annual conference in February there has been much talk of future potential changes in language teaching and the school curriculum. The Tomlinson recommendations and the Languages Ladder would appear to be leading us towards less external assessment but more testing by the teacher. In this time of change there also remains disquiet at the types and styles of exam currently on offer, and in the Exams Forum at the end of the annual conference several views were expressed on a range of subjects related to public examinations.

GCSEs

The discussion was begun by the expression of disappointment that the most recent reform of GCSE specifications had not been used as an opportunity to revise the content of the exams, leaving a lot of transactional work and not pushing the Higher Level candidates far enough. Many of the tasks in the speaking and writing components are out of

date, especially as most people abroad now use ATMs rather than banks to get money and email rather than formal letters or paper correspondence to pen pals to make contacts. The GCSE remains a first person exam with little need even towards A grade to be able to conjugate verbs using other persons.

The view was expressed that the awarding bodies must be made aware of initiatives such as the DfES Languages Ladder which could eventually replace the GCSE for formal language examination. Likewise they should be more in line with the KS3 Framework, which includes knowledge of the culture of a target language country. Students should not perhaps be tested on their cultural knowledge, but more of a taste of the real world in GCSE exams may encourage and excite students more. Neither we nor the students are as engaged as they might be in the face of utilitarian exams: most MFL teachers came into the teaching of the subject to do interesting things and help students communicate; instead we see a series of false and off-putting hurdles.

Several schools have students who would be ready to take the GCSE as early as the end of Y9 and many more by the end of Y10 but are stopped from doing so because of school concerns over

league tables or curriculum limitations or problems. State Language Colleges are obliged to allow a certain percentage of students to take the GCSE early, and this was brought out in the statistics in November's Language Trends Survey (see Spring Edition of the Journal) which showed increased fast-tracking in the state sector as a whole. Some independent schools have also experienced difficulties in recruiting to AS Level those who have taken GCSE early. A number of schools have put programmes into place to counteract this, using the IOL certificate at the end of Y11 for example, or devising their own cultural courses for which some are seeking accreditation through QCA.

It was wondered also what has happened to the old AO Level, seen by many as a good bridge between GCSE and AS which would be a fine antidote to GCSE transactions. The study of literature and prose at the age of 15 or 16 would challenge the brightest students who would learn a great deal more by suddenly seeing red on their essays! Some schools do begin AS courses in Y11 but others warned against having students take modules early as they may lack the maturity or simply be seen as out of step with other subjects by sitting AS exams on the same day as GCSEs. The gap between GCSE

and AS Level does remain large even for the brightest students however.

AS/A2/IB

The discussion moved on to thoughts on the content of AS/A2 exams and a comparison with what is studied for the International Baccalaureate. Recent statistics published in *The Independent* in February would suggest a recent rise of over a third in the number of schools now offering the Diploma, with the majority of these being in the state sector. Some schools such as Sevenoaks and now King's Wimbledon have decided soon to concentrate exclusively away from British public exams.

For those who have taught the IB in the past, a return to teaching AS/A2 is "like death" according to one contributor. AS/A2 content is not exciting but the awarding bodies are limited in the topics they may choose as the content is prescribed by QCA. Try as they might to add interest to tests at this level, examiners struggle to breach the government's agenda. Concern was very much expressed that independent schools are seeing "citizenship" and "PSHE" creeping in through the back door via MFL specifications. We have had to become experts on all manner of topics instead of being allowed just to teach our subjects as colleagues in other

departments have been left to do. In all of this we must think how we would have felt as 17/18 year olds having to read about and debate such topics. It takes courage to miss out the more tedious topics, however, in the face of parental and pupil pressure to cover everything specified for the exam.

We find ourselves also having to teach students not only how to express ideas and opinions but also how to have them in the first place. Little time or room is left then for teachers to bring much excitement to language learning nor to give students the freedom for independence. Admissions tutors at Oxbridge colleges complain too at the restrictions placed on schools and candidates by the prescribed content of exams at AS/A2.

The International Baccalaureate, on the other hand, offers a much wider scope, though some may see this as both scary and exciting! The teaching of languages in the Diploma is based more on a general understanding of the entire world of a language and on styles and registers used in speaking and writing than on any specific topics. It is a holistic and inclusive exam but not a smooth transition from GCSE, and students would benefit from the stepping stone of the old AO Level, especially as an understanding of how to read

literature is a key part of examination at Higher Level.

No textbooks as yet have been produced to match the demands of the Diploma which allows teachers to design their course in a number of ways. It is difficult to get away from an AS/A2 style of teaching, however, as courses are difficult to structure to ensure as many bases as possible are covered. Teaching the IB would allow you to enter the classroom with an idea based on something you have just seen in the news whereas it might take more daring to be this spontaneous for AS/A2. It is important though still to be aware of the style of examination set for the IB and the importance of languages as they are spoken anywhere in the world, not just in Europe. The major advantage of the IB remains that it is a diploma based on philosophy not on the demands of the government of the day.

The perceived difficulty of MFL A2 vs. other A Levels

The panel and floor moved on lastly to consider briefly the idea that the study of languages in the 6th Form is often seen as a harder option to the study of other subjects at the same level. This perception is further emphasised by evidence in some schools that strong students often gain their lowest A2 grade in their language, and that only perhaps

Mathematics would be seen as experiencing similar traits.

Although we are pleased to see that the "Gold Standard" is being preserved in MFL at A Level, the discussion returned to the complaint that we are not being permitted to teach our own subject at this level but rather topics which are both hard and uninviting for students at this age. OCA need and deserve to hear our concerns.

The panel was chaired by Richard Hoare (Tonbridge) and contained Duncan Byrne (Whitgift), Kevin Dunne (Ampleforth), Nathalie Fayaud (Sevenoaks), Julia Whyte (St Francis' College, Letchworth).



Spanish for the secondary school

Sunday 29 May - Saturday 11 June 2005,
Universidad Publica de Navarra, Pamplona, Spain
€ 1,700.

Grants are available to cover most of the course costs

(More details available on <http://www.cilt.org.uk>)

MINUTES OF THE ISMLA AGM HELD ON SATURDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2005 AT MERCHANT TAYLORS' SCHOOL

1. Matters of AGM 2004

- Richard Hoare welcomed delegates to the meeting. He referred to the Minutes taken at the last AGM and asked if there were any matters arising. The minutes were proposed by Peter Ansell and seconded by Thomas Underwood.

2. Chairman's Report

- Richard Hoare told delegates what the Committee had undertaken during the year on their behalf.
- Submissions have been made to consultations on the Tomlinson Report and Key Stage 2 Strategy.
- ISMLA has participated in the Languages Survey organised by CILT and ALL, was present at the Press Conference and at the release of the findings at the Language Show. Richard thanked all those who took part in the survey.
- ISMLA has also sent a representative to the Languages Alliance, the ALL Executive Council and the AQA standing committee.
- Geoffrey Plow has written to OCR and Edexcel about teacher representation, as these boards have no way of teachers voicing their views. He has also written to OCR regarding the GCSE Writing Mark Schemes and is hoping for a satisfactory response. He is also willing to collate complaints and offer advice about boards and examinations so that individual schools do not feel isolated. It is an area where ISMLA can have a role and give help. Geoffrey's contact details can be found on the inside cover of the Newsletter.
- There have been three excellent Newsletters and Richard thanked Duncan Byrne for his hard work, but reported that he was now standing down as Newsletter Editor. His place has been taken by Thomas Underwood of University College School, whose initial innovation was an excellent new design.
- Richard said that he has been on the ISMLA committee for seven years, three of them as Chairman and announced that he is to step down at the end of the Conference. The Committee had

unanimously voted Duncan Byrne as the next Chairman for a three year term at their last meeting. Richard said that he was leaving ISMLA in excellent hands and wished Duncan all the best.

- Richards also thanked Robert Baylis for his work as our representative on the AQA Standing Committee and appealed for a replacement for a three year term, someone who does AQA GCSE, AS and A2 in their school. The committee meets twice a year. Anyone who is interested should talk to Richard Hoare or Duncan Byrne.
- Richard also thanked Astrid McAuliffe for the excellent job she has done as Membership Secretary in maintaining and developing the ISMLA database. Astrid will be staying on the Committee as London and South East Representative. He was pleased to welcome her replacement, John Ridge from Ampleforth to the Committee.
- Richard thanked David Cragg-James for his work as Northern Representative and particularly for his superb training days for the ATB Area 8 training days which ISMLA supports. He has also organised exhibitions for the conference and has offered to do so again next year. He is retiring from Ampleforth in the summer. He has been extremely positive about languages and is an example to us all. Ian Popely is to become the new ATB Area 8 Secretary and ISMLA is looking for a representative for the North on the committee.
- Richard also thanked the Committee which is doing a very good job on behalf of all members of the association.

3. Treasurer's Report

- Peter Ansell reported that the association is solvent and that the figures can be found on the website. He added that if anyone is interested, a complete statement of the accounts is available on request.
- For the Financial Year 1st August 2003 to 31st July 2004, the opening balance was £3088.57 and the total income for the year was £8827.95.

The total expenditure for the year was £8660.65, giving a balance for the year of £167.30. The balance carried forward is £3255.87

- He said that there were two main sources of income: membership fees and the conference. These brought in £8581.50. Main overheads were: the cost of the conference, the

printing and postage of the newsletter and travel expenses to and from committee meetings. The figures have been audited.

- For the current year, beginning on 1st August 2004, the opening balance was £3255.87. The total income is £5060.00. Outgoings are £1665.30. The balance is £6650.57. The main costs are the committee meetings, the newsletter printing and postage, and financial support for the ATB Area 8. All outstanding bills have been paid. Income has been from the membership fees (£225) and the conference (£4860.00). These figures will be audited at the end of the year.
- Peter Ansell and the Committee are still investigating easier ways for members to pay their subscription, but there has been little progress on the Direct Debit front.

4. Membership Secretary's Report

- Astrid McAuliffe reported that there are 167 members, of which 141 had paid. She wished John Ridge all the best for his work in the future.

5. Co-options to the committee subject to AGM approval

- Richard Hoare said that the number of delegates attending the conference was excellent and that all independent schools had been invited. He encouraged delegates to tell colleagues about the association. He said that ISMLA tried to keep the subscription low.
- Richard said that recent co-options to the Committee were subject to approval by the AGM. There has been no need for elections but the following appointments need approving
- Geoffrey Plow proposed by Judith Steinberg seconded by Thomas Underwood
- Thomas Underwood proposed by John Ridge seconded by E. Sylvester
- John Ridge proposed by David Cragg-James seconded by Astrid McAuliffe
- Richard also mentioned the useful information we had received from Chris Roseblade on Videoconferencing. He said that if anyone wanted to make representations to the Senior Management team in their school, Chris would be happy to make

the slides from his presentation available. Anyone interested should contact John Ridge at jpr@ampleforth.org.uk

- Richard also said that ALL were looking for an editor for their publication "Vida Hispánica".
- He also mentioned a Debating Competition run by the French Senate called "Les Défis de la Paix". Sixth Formers would collaborate with a French school and would then join them in the French Senate for a debate on 21st May. Anyone interested should contact Nathalie Fayaud.

6. Appeal from the Editor of the Newsletter

- Thomas Underwood thanked Richard Hoare, Duncan Byrne and Geoffrey Plow for their help and advice and everyone for their contributions to his first newsletter. He made an appeal for articles, of a general nature, on education, on courses and anything of interest to be sent to him. (e-mail address in the Newsletter). The deadline for articles for the next issue is 28th March. If anyone would be willing to review materials, would they please contact Nathalie Fayaud, who has several items for review.

7. AOB

- Duncan Byrne formally thanked Richard Hoare for his memorable work as Chairman of ISMLA in the last three years. He said that Richard had raised the profile of ISMLA within the language world and he had also improved our relationship with other associations such as ALL and CILT, with whom ISMLA is now working. He wanted to show his gratitude for all Richard had done in the last three years.
 - There was no further business and the meeting closed at 2:28pm
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Geoffrey Plow, 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.

Geoffrey 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 Geoffrey at

gaplow@hotmail.com, or via:

*Dr Geoffrey Plow
University College School
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London NW3 6XH*

[020 7433 2302]

ISMLA has been concerned for some time by the uneven nature of exam board responses to problems voiced by member schools. We feel that the problem may well be structural; the following letter from Geoffrey Plow, published in the 'Independent' on 24 March 2005, suggested further steps.

Watch this space!

Why has teacher representation on public exam boards' representative committees become so patchy and unevenly defined? The Independent Schools Modern Languages Association (ISMLA) represents over 150 schools. Each of these has a substantial interest in seeing that their candidates get 'fair play' during each examination session. But they would also dearly like to be able to liaise with examination boards over the way papers set have been perceived by teachers and pupils. Without structured forums for feedback, there is the risk that the contact that schools make with the boards will sound like griping: the odd complaint that the listening tape was hard to hear, the reading comprehension just that bit too difficult for some candidates.

It's hard enough to get responses from examination boards on these matters; ISMLA has raised

issues with OCR and EDEXCEL about exam formats and results, but there have been cases where we just haven't had answers to correspondence. It needn't be that way: modern language teachers don't actually want confrontational dealings with examination boards. What they really crave is the possibility to engage in a dialogue that has a creative effect.

AQA is one examination board that does make formal provision for teachers to consult with them. Their representative committee is reconstituted regularly in a structured way, with places allocated to representative teacher bodies (including ISMLA).

As to other boards, it's a matter of anecdote and recollection. Most ISMLA schools have a teacher who can remember applying to become, say, a member of a subject panel, when OCR was MEG. I've got a letter in response to an application I made. It is dated June 1997. It tells me that demand to be on such a committee had 'exceeded our expectations'. I was, it said, to be put on a reserve list.

Now I have another letter, received last month, that tells me that 'since the introduction of Curriculum 2000 there have been no OCR committees for our GCSE and GCE qualifications'.

What happened in between? Clearly the reserve list never bore fruit. But schools have 'expectations' too. It seems inexplicable that OCR - and EDEXCEL too - should have buried their teachers' committees. Since my 1997 application, one would have thought that examination boards would have been in need of more, not less, feedback on the plethora of papers that now characterise the exam market. Hence the need for the teachers' committees to return.

We wouldn't be trading in complaints - as AQA, from experience, must know. Boards would have contact with their language-teaching customers in an atmosphere mercifully different from that of the additional appeals procedure. And schools wouldn't feel ignored, shunned, or held at arm's length, as ISMLA members have felt.

In a post-Tomlinson landscape where GCSEs and A levels aren't going to go away, this is not a time to limit teachers' involvement. If all of us - together - are to maintain public confidence in the examination system, it's going to be essential for all constituencies to be drawn into dialogue. And that includes teachers.

Reviews

Authentik Spanish AS and A2 Listening and Reading Comprehension Practice Tests

*Authentik Spanish AS/A2 Reading
and Listening Comprehension
Practice Tests 2005-03-25*
P. Garrido + E. Moliné
ISBN 1 871730 821 (Listening)
ISBN 1 871730856 (Reading)

For many years, the Authentik magazine and newspaper have proven an invaluable resource for A level language teachers. Authentik has now extended its offering in the form of the Listening and Reading Comprehension Practice tests, which focus upon the final AS and A2 examinations and enable students to improve their examination skills through a series of topic-focused exercises.

The Spanish tests come in two separate booklets, one based upon the Reading and Writing exam and one upon the Listening, Reading and Writing and are accompanied with a choice of either a tape or CD for the latter. Each test is categorised within a specific topic area and the contents page lists at which level (AS, A2 or both) the exercise is aimed. Each booklet also lists some useful guidelines for both teachers and students at the beginning.

The Reading Comprehension Practice Tests booklet contains fifteen tests in total, six at each of AS and A2 level and three aimed at both levels. Each exercise consists of one or two short articles in Spanish, followed by a series of questions of the type students will meet in the exam, such as multiple choice, true or false, matching lexical items, responding to questions in Spanish and translations. The fact that the tests are short makes them ideal for setting as homework and answers are provided for each, so if necessary students can check their own answers or teachers can go through them in class.

The Listening Comprehension Practice Tests booklet also contains fifteen tests, though nine of these are aimed at both levels. The accompanying CD or tape holds all the texts required to answer the questions and, rather usefully, the booklet also indicates the difficulty level of each text, along with its length and the source of the piece. Again, the questions reflect those of the exam, including gap fills and some more extended writing tasks, followed by the answers and the transcript of each text.

All-in-all, the Authentik Spanish Practice Tests booklets offer a useful tool for teachers to

complement working through actual past papers with students, providing students with the opportunity of building upon their skills in preparation for the exam.

Amanda Shaw
University College School

**French AS/A2 Reading
Comprehension Practice Tests
2005**

Gráinne M Byrne & Ian Rodmell
Authentik
ISBN 1 871730 83X

This photocopiable resource continues in the tradition of Authentik publications, drawing on materials from a range of French newspapers, magazines and websites dating from the last 18 months. There are 15 tests, divided into various levels of difficulty, including three which could be used for either AS or A2 level classes and six exclusively for each exam year, though not rated individually according to difficulty as are the Authentik Listening Comprehension tests. The texts vary in length and are all related in some way to the AS/A2 specifications for all awarding bodies. Question types vary to from gap-filling to the translation of a passage and

answers to all exercises are clearly given.

This is a very useful resource to use with 6th Form students and contains many texts which could readily be used in class or at the end of the teaching of a topic. Some students may at first be surprised by the length of some of the texts, but should be able to cope with most of the questions if they already know much of the vocabulary in each passage. Although the selection of texts is good, I would have liked to see greater variance overall - there are three relating to modern communication, for example - but there are some lively journalistic pieces here, and several could be used for exercises other than reading comprehension, if suitably adapted. I feel the Reading Comprehension Practice Tests are nearer the mark than their Listening stable mates, and will be using them a lot for extra support in the run-up to this year's exams.

P R J Ellis
Felsted School

Authentik GCSE Writing Practice Tests 2004 Volume 2 Spanish

This volume contains 15 tests based on the GCSE writing exams offered by the various awarding bodies. Each test consists of two Foundation Tier questions, one Overlapping question and two Higher Tier questions. Model answers are provided at the end of each exam paper. There are also Guidelines for Teachers, Tips for Students and Class Record Sheets at the front of the booklet.

I was impressed by the variety of activities on offer which ranged at Higher Level from writing to inquire about sponsoring a whale to essay-like questions for and against mobile phones. This reflects in part the differing requirements of the awarding bodies and in part the desire to stimulate the pupils' imaginations. Some of the questions were not therefore directly relevant to the OCR syllabus we follow at my school although there were plenty which were. I liked the model answers as well which can be photocopied (the entire volume comes with photocopying rights within the purchasing institution) and felt these could be a useful time saver or revision aid. The Spanish in these answers was challenging at the Higher Level using both present and imperfect subjunctive on occasions.

Although I would not want to work through this booklet methodically, I would recommend it as a useful contribution to the departmental resources' library which could be photocopied and used not only with GCSE classes but also with a whole range of Spanish classes from beginners to Lower Sixth.

Richard Hoare
Tonbridge School

French Extra 3 TV-ROM

Nelson Thornes, Channel 4.

Most teachers will be familiar with the Extra series on Channel 4 which is available in French, German and Spanish. The episodes are available on video or on three TV-ROMs which cost £49 each; a school site licence is £200.00. The disk features two episodes of a 'Friends' - style mini soap in French aimed at 14-19 year olds. The characters are instantly recognisable and suffer from exaggerated problems, which are easily understood. The humour is slap-stick and over the top, most classes can get the gist of what is going on without subtitles. The disk also includes a teachers' area and a students' area which features activities related to the episodes.

As one would expect, the quality of the recording and sound is much better than video, and I liked the choice of English, French or no subtitles. As the excellent teachers' guide suggests, the mute button can be used for a karaoke activity, with the students taking the role of one of the characters. Full transcripts are available in the students' area, and also as word documents in the teachers' area, making it easy to edit them and create cloze and other exercises. The episodes are also divided into three distinct sections, which make it easy to use the activities over a series of lessons. There is a glossary so students can look up some of the words in the transcripts, but I would have liked it to cover more of the vocabulary used.

The teachers' guide suggests many interesting class activities in addition to the activities supplied on the disk itself. There are some extension exercises such as written work based on the characters, supported by the transcripts and a secret diary section in the students' area. All exercises are produced as both PDF and word documents. A document relating the episodes and activities to the Nelson Thornes text books *Encore Tricolore Nouvelle Edition 3 and 4* would be simple to adapt to any scheme of work.

The activities in the students' area are mainly grammatical, although there is an excellent exercise on slang used in the series, and the students have to have watched the episodes in order to complete the tasks. Grammar points raised by the episodes include modal verbs, *vouloir, devoir and pouvoir*; the perfect tense with *avoir and être*, and imperatives. The exercises would be ideal at GCSE while accessible to Years 8 and 9 and making good revision activities at AS Level. However the series' 14-19 year old age range seems optimistic; I could not imagine using this disk with an A2 class.

This series is definitely worth considering if you are looking for good resources to use with a data projector or smart board. The karaoke option and web link would also make it suitable for use in a digital language laboratory. However, most of the activities are available on the Channel 4 website, so if you already have the videos I would wait until new episodes are available.

Susie Lacey
Canford School

