

Konferenz Übergang Gymnasium – Universität II
Conférence Transition Gymnase – Université II
IDHEAP Lausanne, 2-3 September 2013

Report on
English

1. Introduction

The English Group, consisting of 13 representatives of grammar schools, teacher training institutes and universities from different parts of Switzerland, met to discuss the current situation of English at the transition of their respective institutions and to suggest recommendations for improvement.

It was important to consider English not only as a subject to be studied (literature and linguistics), but also as a *lingua franca* in other branches, especially natural sciences, where students are increasingly confronted with lectures and texts in English, both on Bachelor and more so on Master level. English has become a basic study skill.

Varieties of English languages, literatures and cultures are very diverse, which broadens the scope of the discipline and puts increasingly more pressure on grammar schools. However, these expectations are hard to meet on a national level, with often restricted numbers of lessons and large differences between the status of English in different cantons and different curricula (i.e. immersion programmes).

The general impression is that first-year students at universities are fairly well prepared with the *Matura*. The students' competences are increasing (on average) with more students having reached near-native level when entering universities. But there are areas that need looking into. The English Group would like to support the recommendations of the HSGYM Report ZH from 2008 and particularly focus on the following issues.

2. Areas discussed

Oral skill: Speaking

Recommendation:

Students should be able to speak freely when presenting and use impromptu speech when arguing and debating.

Implementation:

- more often short presentations, with little preparation to encourage spontaneous speaking skills
- debates in class / groups with assigned roles

Aural skill: Listening

Recommendation:

Students should be able to understand both native and non-native English speakers of English and to take notes effectively.

Implementation:

- listening practice with a variety of speakers

- listening practice with very open tasks, such as summary writing, to encourage effective note-taking

Text skill: Reading

Recommendation:

Students should be able to apply a variety of reading strategies (i.e. reading for gist, close reading) and to understand complex texts about different topics.

Implementation:

- practise reading a variety of texts (factual, literary, etc.) both in the classroom and at home with both detailed and open comprehension / interpretation tasks.
- Factual texts should include a variety of topics (science, politics, etc.).

Text skill: Writing

The largest deficiency first-year students at university have is structuring a longer written text.

Recommendation:

Students should be able to structure a text coherently and logically.

Implementation:

- practise paragraph writing (topic sentences)
- planning and structuring (five-paragraph) essays: in the classroom (recognising successful / less successful examples), in groups (cooperative writing), at home (with peer reading and marking in groups in the classroom)
- collaboration with other language departments (this is not a specific English problem!)

Socio-cultural skills

Recommendation:

Students should gain awareness of and manage a diversity of Englishes (accents, dialects, English as a *lingua franca*, American English vs. British English), cultures, styles, genres (intercultural competence).

Implementation:

- expose students to as much diversity as possible

Interdisciplinary skills

Recommendation

Students should manage resources (finding useful information, quoting, references) competently, both in writing and speaking.

Implementation:

- give practical tasks
- develop students' skills in telling serious from unreliable sources on the internet

- teach them self-study skills
- collaboration with other language departments (this is not a specific English problem!)

3. Conclusions

All the above-mentioned recommendations require time in the classroom, especially reading and writing skills with a lot of repeated practice. The English Group suggests teachers practise some skills more deeply and introduce / familiarize students with others. A lot can be gained by cooperating with the other language departments at the schools and thus foster a transfer of skills explicitly. In order to facilitate communication about skill levels the terminology of the CEFR (*Common European Framework of Reference*) should be applied where appropriate.

The contact between grammar school teachers, teacher trainers and university lecturers must be more intense and regular. The English group suggests the following as highly profitable for all the institutions involved:

- an inter-cantonal pool of university experts for *Matura* exams
- university lecturers as advisers for *Matura* papers
- opportunities for teachers to spend a term / semester at a university attending lectures, doing research and / or working on a project
- any form of exchange / dialogue to ensure continuity and transition between institutions, such as conferences, Hochschultag (ZH), etc.

For the English Group
Brigitte Brun, SATE

Oberwil-Lieli, 25 September 2013