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Report on English

Participants

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1. Introduction

The English Group, consisting of 8 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.

Our belief is that English is and should be learnt not only as a means of communication, but also as a subject in its own right, which entails: awareness of English-speaking landscapes, peoples, language varieties, customs and traditions, literature, etc.

Many of the recommendations from KUGU II (2013) are still valid and are listed in the respective report of 2013.¹

At this year's KUGU III we discussed two areas: Writing and Aural Skills. Our focus is on the regular English curriculum. Extras can be had in optional subjects such as exam preparation courses (e.g. Cambridge First / CAE), or in immersion programmes, or writing the matura paper in English.

The following recommendations focus on how English as a subject can further contribute to basic study skills and propaedeutics.

¹ http://www.math.ch/kugu2/dokumente/report_ag_englisch.pdf / Gymnasium Helveticum 2/2014, page 20

2. Areas discussed

a. Writing skills

put more emphasis on	ideas for implementation
planning a text and revising it	– students have to hand in their planning notes
précis writing	– rewriting a longer text into a shorter one – e.g. 100 words exactly
writing an argumentative / critical essay	– developing a thesis – 5 paragraph essay (paragraphing, cohesion, transitions)
awareness of genre and register	– formal writing task, e.g. letter of complaint

Given the limited and dwindling resources - in combination with the strong focus on the development on language and literary skills -, not all of this can be done on a regular basis and individually, but may be done in a limited way in the classroom (e.g. concentrating on parts of texts: students only write introduction and conclusion, but just plan the main body of the text; students evaluating each others' texts; having the language checked by on-line resources, e.g. <http://www.textinspector.com>)

b. Aural skills

put more emphasis on	ideas for implementation
note-taking from longer talks (audio and audio-visual)	– podcasts, TED-talks
training listening stamina	– audiobooks

3. Concluding Remarks

Considering the conclusions of the KUGU II report (2013), the following must be pointed out:

- In the last few years, there has been a deterioration in teaching conditions (budget cuts, larger classes), which makes a cooperation between universities and grammar schools increasingly difficult. The political environment is at odds with demands for dialogue and cooperation between the institutions. It is paramount that long term further education and sabbaticals are fostered, e.g. enabling teachers to spend a semester at university.
- Moreover, we require resources to cultivate the exchange with the secondary schools level 1 and primary schools.
- The “Rahmenlehrplan für die Maturitätsschulen”² is rather outdated and should urgently be modernized.
- All our recommendations depend on both political will and financial support.

We are passionate about our subject and want to share this attitude with our students. Keeping curiosity on the menu helps teachers sustain their subject interest and engage students in important topics. English at Matura level should open doors, including that to further study.

For the English Group

Brigitte Brun, SATE

Oberwil-Lieli, 8 October 2017

² <http://www.edk.ch/dyn/26070.php>