

## The War of the Words

### A regional debating challenge

Friday 16th November 2012 at Trent College

Teachers often tell us that they really appreciate the opportunity their students receive to speak in the target language at our events. So we decided to create an event all around the topic of speaking and debating. We were delighted that Trent College agreed to host this event. We limited this challenge to students studying French in Years 12 and 13, as we knew that this would be linguistically demanding.

The places for the event were taken quickly by Ratcliffe College, Repton School, Birkdale School, Leicester High School, Nottingham High School, Groby Community College and two teams from the host school Trent College.

After a quick ice breaker in French, the day started with a keynote talk from Roger Helmer, MEP. Roger talked about his own career and how important the understanding of language and culture was within international trade and the European Parliament.

The competition then started in earnest with each team taking part in a prepared debate. There were two debating topics that had been allocated here and teams either debated whether 'a good education can only be achieved in a private school' or if 'Women's Day is a waste of time'. Teams were judged on their speaking skills, their content, their star quality and their teamwork.



Following this, everyone was treated to an hour and a half of professional speaking skills training, involving everyone in the room doing exercises to improve their skills. Having done one round of debates already, it was easier to find examples of what works well and what didn't.

Then it was time for a second round of debates and for teams to put into practice what they had just learned. It was gratifying to see how improved the speaking was on the second debate, especially considering that this time they only had 15 minutes in which to prepare their topics! The topics for debate had a lighter tone, and teams

debated whether 'it would be better to invite Jamie Oliver to dinner than Delia Smith', or 'whether it would be better to invite Paul McCartney or Robbie Williams to their home'.

Taking into account the results from the first and second debates, the two top teams of Ratcliffe College and Repton School battled it out in the final. By this time, the teams really had to think on their feet whilst debating whether 'French cuisine is better than English cuisine', as they only had 5 minutes to prepare.

It was impressive that given the short preparation time, the teams not only produced an excellent standard of debate, but even managed to make the audience laugh. This was no mean feat since

many people won't even speak in front of an audience in English, let alone in French with minimal preparation time.

It was close, but Ratcliffe College were declared the winners and enjoyed as their prize a trip to London to Europe House, the home of the UK's MEPs as well as a tour of the Royal Courts of Justice.

The students rated the Public Speaking Training as the most useful part of the day although 19 of the 32 students did admit they enjoyed the debating the most.

**Student comments included:**

- *I enjoyed meeting other people and recognizing my own improvements in debating skills*
- *I enjoyed debating for the first time in FRENCH even though I was very nervous*
- *It was more helpful than I expected. Didn't expect help on techniques but was great that we got some.*
- *Amazing!!*
- *It was so much better than I thought it would be.*



**Teachers' comments included:**

Presentation/debating skills delivered in very lively, engaging way. Interactive, fun, pacy and punchy. I really enjoyed it and judging from the BODY LANGUAGE of my students, I'm sure they did too. Many thanks.

*Sui Cushing, Ratcliffe College*

Thank you for the very useful feedback. The students had an amazing time and they all learnt so much about themselves and about speaking skills.

*Chris Bugh, Groby Community College*

Just a line to thank you for this excellent event -the pupils were indeed proud of themselves for having taken part and they learnt a lot in the process. We all found your talk most enlightening and discussed all the points you had made during our lesson today, as the group told the others about it all. So congratulations to you and your team for such a successful day.

*Melissa Blain, Repton School*

**We would like to thank the following Business Language Champions for supporting this event:**

- Hélène Ronde-Ousteau, Boots plc
- Kay Marsden, retired UKTI adviser
- Cath Goff, teacher
- Stella Kenway, director of Zanoubia Communications

and particularly Roger Helmer, MEP



**We would also like to thank Trent College for hosting, and in particular Keri Price for all his help.**

**Contact**

Sally Fagan  
Business Language Champions  
01949 860167 / 07967 699614