



## Case Study 3: Grammar School

**Name:** Magda Kralova

**Job Title:** Teacher of English and French

**School:** Secondary Grammar School of Hejcin, Olomouc, Czech Republic

**Featured Products:** FCE Exam Success Plus, CAE Exam Success Plus, CPE Exam Success Plus

### Background

The Secondary Grammar School of Hejcin is the largest school of its kind in the region of Olomouc, and one of the biggest in the Czech Republic. With 1000-plus students and about 90 teachers, the school enjoys an excellent position in the country's educational league tables.

The school runs three study programs and educates its students from the ages of 11 to 19. From the age of 13 students can elect to follow a Bilingual Study programme. This begins with a two-year intensive period of English; thereafter many other lessons are taught through the medium of English. Although some of the students who choose the Bilingual Study option go on to become interpreters or translators, the majority of students are simply aware of the importance of English for their future. Some choose to work or go to university in the United Kingdom, and appreciate that a sound knowledge of the English language will give them a competitive edge in today's global economy.

Magda Kralova is a Teacher of English and French at the Grammar School.

## **The challenges of exam preparation**

The Grammar School has been involved with University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations since 1996. The Certificate in Advanced English exam (the CAE) may be taken as an optional and additional qualification by students in their final year of study, usually at the age of 19.

One of the particular challenges in preparing students for the CAE exam is the shortage of teacher time to devote to specific exam preparation. According to Magda, who has taught English for the last four years, “it’s a constant problem”. Pupils at the school who were interested in taking the CAE exam received a one-hour (optional) class per week. Two of the greatest pressures on teachers were how to fit the marking of students’ written work into their busy schedules, and teachers’ confidence in grading students’ work according to the exam specifications.

## **How the school discovered Flo-Joe**

Magda explained how the Deputy Head heard about an essay competition on the web, organised by the British Council - the prize being a one-year subscription to Flo-Joe’s online “Exam Success Plus” series. Exam Success Plus is an online self-study resource with week-by-week lessons to support candidates for the Cambridge FCE, CAE and CPE exams. With self-marking tests for the Reading and English in Use papers, as well as exam-style Writing tasks with model answers, it seemed a possible solution to some of the challenges facing teachers.

The school decided to enter the competition and were "really surprised and pleased" to hear they’d won one of eight prizes. Magda and the Deputy Head, Julia Faberova, were invited to a launch event at the British Council’s office in Prague. Here Fiona Joseph, Flo-Joe’s Founding Manager, gave a training session called “Getting the Most out of Exam Success Plus”, as well as distributing some induction packs. The presentation was followed by an informal networking session over lunch with the chance to meet other competition winners and British Council staff, including Carl Rhymer, Regional Business Development Manager (Exams) from the London office.

## **Implementing Exam Success Plus**

When Magda returned to her school, she found “it was extremely easy to get started” with Exam Success Plus. Even before the teacher event in Prague she had emailed all her English teaching teachers who, in turn, had told their students about the resources that were soon going to be available.

Magda then launched what she called the “Flo-Joe Seminar” , an optional two-hour session per week, where exam students could come to the school’s computer room and work on the Exam Success Plus resources at their own pace, and primarily on their own, but with the support of a supervisory teacher. There was always a set of dictionaries available and the teacher was there to answer questions if necessary. One of the key factors in the success of the program was the excellent IT provision of one computer per student.

Demand for the Flo-Joe seminar was immense right from the start and in the lead-up to the CAE exam. About 35 students signed up for the seminar. One of the first things that Magda did was to get her students to register for the weekly email alert, sent by Flo-Joe every Monday, to remind the students what activities were available in that week’s lesson. “That was definitely a big help - we all need reminders.”

Magda found the resources eased some of the pressure of marking students’ work. “What was very good was the sample written answers. The students could actually compare their own text with the sample answer.”

As well as the ‘guided self-study’ model of the Flo-Joe Seminar, the school made use of their Exam Success Plus subscription in two other ways. Magda was able to use the resources with other English classes as a supplement to CAE-level coursebooks. She also recommended the CPE (Proficiency) level of Exam Success Plus to teaching colleagues for their own professional development. They found it a “well-structured and efficient” method of topping-up their English language skills.

## The results

The school entered 28 candidates for the winter/spring 2006 sitting of the Cambridge CAE exam, an increase in the number of exam entries. The pass rate for that session was 100%. (For comparison, the CAE pass rate in December 2005 for the Czech Republic as a whole was 79%.)

Not only that, the students achieved higher-than-average grades. Whereas the majority (about 45%) of CAE candidates who pass do so with a C grade, the school achieved outstanding results. Three achieved A grades, the majority gained a B, and a few passed with a C. "They did really well and I was particularly proud of those who got As. It was great."

To conclude Magda says, "I think it was a great success and the students will be asking about the seminar again for this year!"

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