

# TESTIMONIES

## Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick, Ireland

*report from Marie D, November 2009*

The job of *lecteur/lectrice* in Limerick consists of two semesters of 12 weeks and of three different kinds of tutorials: grammar classes, conversation classes and classes in a Language Laboratory with computers.

The first year grammar classes can be taught by the *lecteur* in both semesters. The students are not able to understand grammatical terminology in French at this level so the classes must be in English which can require a lot of energy if you were not used to speaking it before. For me it was easier because I had already spent some time abroad. But being put in a position where you have no choice is also the best way to learn a language and makes you improve faster. Another prerequisite for the job is to be sure to be able to explain French grammar because it seems something natural when you speak, but it is not so for the students; maybe having the FLE option can help a bit, but personally I didn't have too much difficulty in explaining it and I never took that particular option. This year, a new system of assessment was introduced in 'contrôle continu' so that during the semester, there were papers to correct from one week to another (four times on the whole, which takes some time).

The conversation classes are for second years, final years (some of them come only in the second semester as they spend the first one in schools for a teaching training). The preparation of these classes and of the Language Laboratory sessions requires a certain amount of time because you need to look for texts, pictures or other materials to make the students speak. The difficulty is that they are shy and that it is important to find a way not to be the one who speaks all the time. So at first, I decided to make them do presentations in the second semester and to force them to have imaginary debates (court debates, T.V. shows, people meeting in the street...) which seem to give them more interest in the tutorials. Another possibility is to give them a topic they can research for the week after to discuss in class. Most of the time, they are able to speak, they just need to be obliged to do it!

The Language Lab classes are also for second years and final years. This tutorial is aimed at improving the students' listening skills. You have to look for audio and video files (or why not movies, from time to time!) that they have to listen to so as to answer questions on the material (as in their exam). In this tutorial you will have to use a programme which enables the teacher to control all the students' computer from his/her desk. The programme is a bit complicated but very interesting if you want to improve your own computer skills. You will probably have a training session at the beginning of the year and if ever there is something wrong someone will help you solve the problem.

There's no specific material to be brought to Limerick. You'll have an office so you can look for texts that have already been used by the *lecteurs* before. Or (and I discovered it

was easier) you can use new material from the Internet or from the various magazines you will find there. For the grammar classes, the main exercises will be given to you by the French teachers from the French department. The most important piece of advice I would give is: if you have your own computer with the Internet at home it's also a good thing because you will have to use it a lot for your classes. Otherwise you will have your own computer in your office at the university.

This job is very interesting as a first teaching experience because it is not as difficult as working with younger people but at the same time it will give you a first impression of what being a teacher really is. And I feel I have gained a lot of confidence from one year to another. In Mary Immaculate College, you will find the support you need even though you will be responsible for the students in your care. Only one thing: it's really worth it!

*From H el ene C., Limerick 2006-2007*

In fact the job of *lecteur / lectrice* here consists in tutorials. During the first semester, I had in charge grammar TDs with the 1st years - which are to be in English, because the students are not able to follow a class in French at that stage - as well as conversation and lab sessions with the 2nd and 4th years. During the 2nd semester, I did not have grammar tutorials any more, and got the 3rd years instead for conversation and lab classes.

The grammar TDs consist in explaining grammatical points to the students, in order to complete their grammar lecture, and in giving them exercises to do in class. Each week they submit copies, which are to be corrected and marked.

The conversation classes are simply a discussion, generally based on a text from the news or on a specific topic. I was not given any instruction for this part as well as for the language lab : I could use any support and any topic, the goal being simply to prepare the students for the final exam. As far as the conversation class is concerned, the exam is an oral with examiners, during which the students are asked various questions about their student experience, hobbies, lectures, etc...

The lab session is set in the language laboratory, and it requires some knowledge concerning computers - it was not my case and I found it a bit difficult at the beginning, since all the explanations I got were obviously in English and I did not know this kind of vocabulary. The exam for this class is an oral exam based on the students' oral comprehension of a text and their capacity to answer some questions on it. Here there is no other examiner than the *lecteur / lectrice*, who has to prepare and correct the exam.

As far as I am concerned, I had not done the *parcours FLE*, and I was 21 when I got the job here, and I did not find it was a particular obstacle. I did not have any experience in teaching either, and got used to it very quickly - except for the grammar TDs in English, which I found very intimidating at the beginning since it is not my mother language. But obviously, I think

that to have experience would help a lot! What I mean is that if one never got the occasion to teach in front of a class before, it is not to be considered as a drawback. Personally, I think this is a really great experience, and the people working in MIC are really friendly and professional, which helps a lot!