



BREZEL-NEWS

Fourteenth Edition, March 2018

Newsletter of the German Saturday Schools Islington and Hackney Wick

Hello, dear Saturday School families in Islington and Hackney Wick,

Finally – another Brezel-News! There is always a lot going on at Saturday School: Carnival, closure due to snow, parents' consultations, book table, Easter egg hunt... and I love perfectly normal Saturdays. We want to sincerely thank you for the great response to our Saturday School survey. 48% - we are very happy with this high response rate as well as with the overwhelmingly positive feedback. We are planning to present you with a more detailed evaluation in our summer edition.

We want our newsletter to appear once a term again, as a valuable link between our two schools in Islington and Hackney Wick. We want to discuss subjects relevant to our German-speaking international families. Which brings us to one of the topics in this newsletter.

Who are we? Are we German, Swiss, Austrian, British or... Many of our children have several nationalities. And we parents? Since the Brexit referendum many have been contemplating whether to become British or not. Others would prefer to avoid the topic. We are irritated by the



Parents' consultation day in Islington: Tania Urban's was the first of currently three Saturday School families with four children enrolled. Max and Bruno started in 2006, then Ella followed and in September 2011 Otto completed the siblings team in our ranks. Max is now preparing for his A level exam this year, and Tania is actually German-Swedish.

way Brexit dominates our everyday life and keeps coming up at parties, in the media or at work.

The topic of A level exams is particularly relevant to our Islington families with older children. But on another level the issue relates to the GCSE exams, which we are also aiming to offer in Hackney from 2020 onwards, and eventually to the question why we want our children to attend Saturday School. Finally, Hackney teacher Felicitas Ader explains why Herbert the parrot is part of the fun in her lessons.

As of now, our school management team is supported by Rebecca Johnson in Islington and Kerstin Klein in Hackney Wick. Since May 2017, Natalie Denby, who has been teaching in Islington since 2013, has been one of our company directors. In the last few weeks we also found a number of new "guarantors" for our "Limited by Guarantee" Saturday School company. They would be liable with just £1 in case of insolvency, and the company directors are obliged to inform them about our company activities at least once a year.

We look forward to working with them, and that all of you remain loyal to us.

With warmest regards – Cathrin

Cathrin Cordes, Managing Director
German Saturday Schools Islington & Hackney Wick

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To be or not to be British

Citizenship contemplations

“Good evening, Brit.” Cathrin was in the aptly named pub “Dazwischen” (In-between) in Berlin when her son sent her this text message, informing her that her citizenship application had been approved. Just a few years ago, she could not have imagined to ever apply for British citizenship.



Cathrin found out about her British citizenship in a pub called „Dazwischen“ (in-between) in Berlin

Since the Brexit referendum many Saturday School parents have been considering whether to acquire British citizenship or not. The Brexit decision has led to a strong increase in applications from other EU citizens: In 2017 there were 38,528 applications, circa two and a half times as many as in 2016 (15,460). Germans are in fifth place, after Poles, Italians, Romanians and French, and for them the number of applications has even tripled (from 797 in the year up to June 2016 to 2,338 in the year up to 2017). Though compared to the total number of 299,000 Germans living in Great Britain, the share of applicants remains low.

Legally speaking, citizenship describes the affiliation of people to a certain state. Through citizenship one acquires all rights and obligations as set out by the state in its constitution and its laws, for example the right to vote or the obligation to pay taxes. Each state also defines the conditions for the acquisition or loss of citizenship as well as the terms for dual nationality. In this respect, the British are very generous while Germany traditionally advocates a more conservative attitude towards dual nationality.

While many of our Saturday School children have acquired the right to maintain dual nationality due to parentage, a German who applies for citizenship of another country will usually lose his or her German citizenship. Only in 2000 the possibility to keep German citizenship was granted if a special written permission (“Beibehaltungsgenehmigung”) has been applied for beforehand. Following an amendment in 2007, Germans do not lose German citizenship if the new citizenship acquired is of an EU member state or Switzerland. Since then German citizenship has automatically been

retained when one decided to acquire British citizenship.

It remains to be seen whether a special permit to retain German citizenship will be needed again following Great Britain’s exit from the EU. At the moment, there is still a chance – for a few more months at least – to complete the process before Britain leaves the EU on 29th March 2019. Certain requirements need to be met to qualify for naturalisation. Generally, you need to have held permanent residency for at least one year, plan to keep living in the UK in the future and to have sufficient English language skills and knowledge of the UK. Currently, the processing time for permanent residency, which is prerequisite for naturalisation, is one to three months. Prerequisite for this is a minimum residency of five years. The Home Office should backdate your permanent residency to the date when you first fulfilled all requirements. If that was at least one year ago, one can immediately go on to apply for citizenship, and processing time for naturalisation takes a further two to three months. Altogether the application, including language and Life in the UK tests, costs around £1,500.

Obviously, besides the legal aspects there are many emotional aspects to consider. Discussions as to whether this is the right step or not are sometimes as uncompromising as those between Brexiteers and Remainers.

Our Saturday School director Natalie has already applied for British citizenship in 2006. Back then, Natalie had to also apply to retain her German citizenship. “This included an appointment at the German Embassy and a letter in which I had to explain my cultural and familial reasons. The naturalisation process was relatively straightforward as I had been married to a Briton and lived in the country for some time.” The greatest difficulty was to document all absences over several years (just as it is now necessary for the Permanent Residency application) and to find two British referees who had known Natalie long enough. Natalie’s reason for applying for British citizenship was first and foremost the wish for participation. “I had been living in Great Britain for my entire adult life, have worked here, paid taxes – I wanted to be able to participate and to vote. Also, following the birth of my children (my younger daughter was a few months old at the time) I developed a closer relationship with the country, for example through use of the health care system and later the school system.”

Altogether Natalie experienced her British



Elizabeth Ruddick, immigration lawyer of Wesley Gryk Solicitors (and former Saturday School mother), informing parents in Islington about their options, June 2017

citizenship as a positive decision, even if some of her German friends were surprised by the move. "Brexit has changed my feelings towards this subject," says Natalie. "I always felt really positively towards the country – after all, I had arrived as a young adult in 1996. Now I see the situation in a slightly more negative light and I am not sure how I would decide today. After all these years I definitely still feel German."

Klaus-Dieter also sees dual nationality as positive and has been British since 2010. He feels it is important to show commitment to the country you live in. "People were saying 'but you don't need it'. But for me it was a case of enrichment and not an either/or question. I enjoy living in Great Britain and I think it's quite cool to have two passports. I also had a practical reason. Now I have the same passport as my family when we go travelling and while abroad we are looked after by the same embassy. When asked whether it is possible to be loyal towards two states, Klaus-Dieter answers in the affirmative, although his loyalty towards Great Britain did wobble a bit the morning after the referendum. "I couldn't believe it and thought I'd take my family to live in Berlin. But over the course of the morning it occurred to me that I was British, too, and then I asked myself whether I should leave the country to the Brexiteers. I thought, no, the country is too beautiful to abandon, and I also felt I had a responsibility towards the country."

Cathrin admits that she was surprised at Klaus-Dieter's decision at the time: "I embrace being German, was born and raised in Germany and only came to London at the age of 33. I thought that having another nationality would somehow feel dishonest. In January 2016, shortly after the announcement of the Brexit referendum, a conversation with a Columbian friend, who has been British for many years, prompted a change of heart: "I have lived here for so long and paid my taxes, I wanted to have a voice. Of course, I will always feel Columbian, but what difference does it

make to have another passport sitting on a shelf?" Now Cathrin sees naturalisation as a logical step towards taking responsibility for her own actions, having lived in this country for over 20 years, and that citizenship is also a right when you have fulfilled the prerequisite conditions as a citizen.

Matthias and his Portuguese wife Filipa have been Brits for about three months: "We had been envisaging the process for some time. Three years ago, we took the citizenship test. Even before the referendum we applied for Permanent Residency, waited for a year, gathered many documents. We wanted to have the same rights as our British fellow citizens. We were never allowed to vote and always had a feeling that we were not on a par with everyone else. Now we have a status that is equal. British citizenship also provides more security, which is important to me, especially as I run my own company. We have invested a lot in this country, social capital as well. Also, we don't know how far we can trust in continued good will towards Europeans in the future. In any case, with dual nationality you have more options."



Saturday School parents Filipa & Matthias as new Brits after their Citizenship Ceremony in December, with daughters Lia & Maia who are German and Portuguese

Matthias in our Hackney school also plans to apply for naturalisation. He has been living in London for 12 years and applied for permanent residency after the referendum. "I have held permanent residency for six months now. At first, I thought, 86 pages – I won't be part of that. But then it turned out that the process is relatively straightforward for employees. I don't feel British, but I'm doing it for my family. I will wait before applying for citizenship; however, my wife would much prefer to have a German passport."

Having secured her permanent residency back in 2009, Tanja has similar views on naturalisation. Her husband is Brazilian which is why she needed permanent residency to ensure his residence in

Great Britain. "We have not applied for citizenship yet, mostly because it is very expensive. That could change because the situation for EU citizens does not seem as secure since the referendum. For us Germans it is an unfamiliar feeling to be merely tolerated. We will move on with naturalisation when we feel it has become necessary." Tanja is concerned about her family's future rights. "I could imagine disadvantages for example with regards to the NHS or pension rights if you cannot present a British passport."

Svenja and Boris, too, have held Permanent Residency for many years. They are concerned about the future and are considering taking the next step towards British citizenship. "One reason against it is the cost," says Boris. "It bothers me that so much money is made through the whole Brexit thing." Alexander though has no plans for a future as a British subject. "For the self-employed the process is considerably more complex and I just can't be bothered. I understand the basic concept of securing one's livelihood but I have no plans to do so."



Cathrin and her French friend at the Citizenship Ceremony

Raoul and Annamaria who are both German also reject naturalisation: "Our passport – and thus our nationality – is part of our identity. Although we have lived in Great Britain quite happily and for a long time we see ourselves as Germans. We see no reason to take on British citizenship in addition. Of course, we would like to cast our vote at general elections, but there are many other ways to actively engage in this country. When the UK exits the EU, holding dual citizenship might become more complicated for Germans. We would never want to give up our German passports.

In addition, we come from a republic and don't want to give up our status as free citizens – through naturalisation we would become subjects of the Queen and thus part of the monarchy, and we would have to pledge allegiance to the Queen and her heirs at the citizenship ceremony. Most likely, we as Germans will keep similar residence rights to

the ones we have now, possibly supported by a registered permanent residency. Fortunately, the German passport continues to give us freedom to travel and settle in all other EU states."

Jana from the Hackney School is also determined to stay relaxed. "I have not applied for Permanent Residency and I am not going to. I won't rule it out 100 %, but I am an optimist. For one, I am not doing it for financial reasons. For another, I'm quite stubborn because I am fundamentally opposed to GB exiting from the EU. If I were to apply for British citizenship, only if I can have dual citizenship. We have also been contemplating moving to Germany. On principle, I am against scaremongering, especially if you don't know what is going to happen. After all, there has not been an official statement from the government about what will happen to us." The British government has not clarified yet how the new settled status for EU residents is supposed to work.

Many others feel like Jana, they are going to wait and see whether to apply for Permanent Residency and/or British citizenship or not. There are many reasons for this stance: They are emotionally opposed, are feeling defiant or hope that Brexit may never happen at all.

Cathrin's closing thoughts: "I am glad to be British now, but I did not find the process easy and often had to persuade myself to take the next step. I found it strange to officially become the subject of a monarch with the pledge of allegiance at the naturalisation ceremony. It was good to realise that the South African sitting next to me at the ceremony felt the same. Her Jewish father had to flee from Germany and she values her German passport as part of her family heritage. Together we pledge allegiance and wonder how as part of the British people we are now responsible for the Brexit vote, too. On my return journey by bus, my French friend who also became British and I talk about the ceremony. Suddenly, a young woman sitting behind us says: "Congratulations on becoming British. I'm about to become German," and a woman in the next row adds: "And I'm about to become Dutch." In-between, as the name of the Berlin pub resumes – there is more to it than you think.

By Cathrin Cordes and Martina Köpcke

German A Level classes at Saturday School

Why is it worthwhile?

The German Saturday School Islington has been offering A level preparation for about 10 years. Initially, we only supported students who were preparing to take German A level at their English secondary schools, until three pioneering Saturday School students chose to work towards a German A level exam at Saturday School in addition to their other A level subjects at their English schools. Since 2011 a total of 32 students have successfully prepared for their A level exams at our Saturday School and while German is in decline at English secondary schools, we are delighted with groups of 10 or more students who continue to study German with us after finishing their GCSE exams.

Fewer and fewer British schools are offering German at A level. While nationwide nearly 11 000 students passed German A level in 1993, there were only 3663 left in 2017, and 10 of those had actually been studying at our Saturday School. That represents nearly 0,4 %, an impressive result for an organisation like ours that was set up by parents, is not supported by any official bodies and has to painstakingly acquire all teaching materials and information regarding exam specifications. Luckily, we have always had fantastic and dedicated teachers who have made this possible: Diane Falkenberg, Maria Mikl, Boris Born, Katja Forreiter, Tanja Bridge, Charlotte Schulze, Gabriele Wölfle, Christine Pleines, Melanie Dietze, Annika Meyer and Michaela Knowles Barron. In 2017, Melanie's class was one of the largest German A level classes in the country. Quite rightly, Melanie was recognised, as runner-up at the German Teacher Awards in the German Embassy, as was Christine Pleines in 2013 (in our opinion they both deserved first prize, obviously).

This is not the only advantage of studying German at Saturday School. Unfortunately, English Sixth Form students can usually only study for three A levels, and because of the subject requirements for many university courses there is little room for a foreign language. Thus, studying for a German A level at Saturday School is a rare opportunity for many students to gain a fourth A level qualification. This is seen as a bonus by many British universities. The level of recognition depends on the individual university – e.g. the University of Manchester recognised the German A level of one Saturday School student and to claim his offer he only had to achieve two further successful A level results, while Imperial College noted the German A level favourably, but still required three further very good A level results.

A fourth A level subject is particularly relevant when students consider to attend a German university. The general requirement for the recognition of a

foreign school's qualifications as equivalent to the German Abitur is that four independent academic subjects were studied at Sixth Form level. Three of those have to be A levels, the fourth at least an AS level (the new exam system still offers AS level exams, but they do not count towards a final A level exam as in the past).



2016/2017: We jokingly claimed that Melanie and her assistant Stephan Hammes taught the biggest German A level class in the country.

One of the four subjects has to be a language (e.g. English or German), and another one has to be Mathematics or a natural science (Biology, Chemistry or Physics). Also, German universities require formal proof of a sufficient level of German language skills to be able to enrol (unless the course is taught in English). A German A level counts as proof of German language skills and fulfils the academic language subject specification.

On top of these general requirements there are further subject specific conditions: To apply to study for a natural science degree for example, two of your A levels need to be in Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry or Physics, while for technological subjects one A level has to be Maths and a second one in a natural science or computer science, or for a medical degree you need three A levels in Maths or the natural sciences.

For all these university courses, there is still the general precondition of an A level language. This reflects the fundamental difference in the weighting of language learning and ability. Since 2004, foreign language learning above the age of 14 is voluntary, and many Secondary School students only have foreign language classes from Year 7-9, and in the Sixth Form students do not have to continue with English either.

Our students who are considering studying in Germany have the opportunity to cover their academic subject requirements via the three A levels studied at their English schools, while the language requirement can be achieved with their German A level at Saturday School. At the same time, their German A level will also be recognised as sufficient proof of German language skills. Leon and Alexander, who finished their German A levels

three years ago, are two former Saturday School students who are studying in Germany: Leon is studying Physics in Munich, and Alexander (the son of our Islington teacher Martina Geccelli) is studying Civil Engineering in Berlin.



German Teacher Awards 2017: Melanie receives her recognition from John le Carré, a big advocate of German language learning

While content and language level of the British GCSE exams are not always exciting for our bilingual students, the A level topics are interesting and the language level is challenging. They include the development of society, politics and art, migration and multiculturalism, as well as German history, particularly reunification. The analysis of a book or a film is another compulsory part. The exam boards specify a list of books and films, and our teachers decide together with their students what they would like to choose: *Almanya*, *The Lives of Others*, *Good-bye Lenin*, *The Miracle of Bern* and *The Wave* are possible films; the book list includes *Andorra*, *The Reader* and *The Visit*.

This year (2018) the new A level exam specifications are applied for the first time. Unlike in the past, students cannot sit the exam in two parts (AS and A2) any more, and the whole A level content is covered in one overall final exam. In this, students have to write two short essays of 300 words each, their reading and listening comprehension skills are valued and they have to do a short translation – from German into English and vice versa. Further, they have to prepare a project on a topic of their choice and speak about it in their oral exam. Linguistically they have to be able to express themselves well and in a sophisticated way, and with regard to content, they have to be able to argue critically, analytically and in depth. Here in the UK, both GCSE and A level exams are offered by different exam boards, most notably by Edexcel and AQA. The required language level is the same with both exam boards and the topics are similar, although there are some differences in the specific tasks.

While students at English secondary schools are taught German in eight lessons per week in circa 40 school weeks, at Saturday School they have just

two lessons per week on circa 30 Saturdays per school year. That's why our Saturday School students generally take three to four rather than two years to prepare for their A level exam, but that works out quite well when they already take their GCSE exam in Year 8 or Year 9.

At our Saturday School in Islington we teach the A level content over three years. In the first year following the GCSE exam we initially make a point of advocating a more informal approach to lessons, not only sticking to the the confines of the curriculum and introducing access to this higher level of German language in a more relaxed way. But at least from the second half of the year onwards we look towards A level specifications as we choose topics or films. In the second and third year we work with A level books and the emphasis shifts more and more towards exam-oriented preparation. The various required A level topic areas are covered during these three years. In some cases, students move straight into the second year after their GCSE exam. Others decide to repeat a year, especially if they are perhaps taking a term off when they prepare for their other GCSE subjects in Year 11. Mostly, Saturday School students end up taking their German A level exam in Year 12.

It is important to also make use of the advantages of living in a bilingual family in preparing for the exam. Our students' understanding of the language is generally very good. This means they find it easier than other learners to watch German films and video clips, follow German news on radio and television or internet blogs, and to read German magazines and newspaper articles comprehensively. At home and on holiday they have access to German-speaking media, and parents and relatives can support the learning process. Exam success can thus be encouraged at home. The specific preparation for the exam format, interesting and engaging discussions of exam topics and many tips for independent learning are of course offered at Saturday School. Our students almost always achieve As and Bs in the exams, which is a very respectable result considering that achieving an A or A* in a foreign language A level in the UK is generally rare, and even more so in German.

Beyond all these exam and university oriented considerations there is a very basic reason for continuing to attend Saturday School after GCSE exams. As our children get older, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain multilingual family conversations, and if children stop attending Saturday School after their GCSE exam, aged 12 or 13 years, there is a big risk that their German skills will simply fade away. However, if they continue to grapple with an ambitious A level syllabus until they are 16 or 17 years old, they have hopefully

achieved a level which should allow them be able to fall back on their German for the rest of their lives. For that reason we are very proud that in every A level year group we have had two or three students who did not want to take further exams, but who came to us simply to continue to learn German, just because they enjoyed it.

By Cathrin Cordes and Christine Pleines



At Saturday School, A level preparation runs over three years: all our current Islington students with their teachers Annika Meyer, Melanie Dietze and Michaela Knowles-Barron

Our A level class 2018

The students in Islington

Twelve students are currently attending our eldest class in Islington and have been preparing for the A level exam with their teacher Annika Meyer. Five of them are going ahead with the exam after Easter: Felix, Max, Luzie, Fabian and Medard. All five have taken different paths throughout their Saturday School career. Felix has been with us since 2005, and before him, his older brother Leon prepared the A level with us and is now studying Physics in Munich. Felix, too, could imagine going on to study in Germany. "I could save a lot of money," says Felix. "I would maybe study History." Max has been a Saturday School student since 2006. Like some other students who would not mind having a free Saturday, he almost paused or even gave up after his GCSE three years ago. But he stuck with it; being friends with Leon for so many years was quite helpful. Luzie, with us since 2008, even wanted to give up before her GCSE exam in 2014. We could persuade her to stay one more year to sit her GCSE, and now she is taking the A level exam. Last summer, she took a term off to prepare for her GCSEs in the other subjects.

In September 2016, Fabian came to us from the Saturday School in Ealing because they did not offer A level preparation. He never regretted his transfer, feels at home in the class and looks towards the A level exam with confidence: "I think the exam will be fine." Medard, who only joined us in October last year, has also settled in quickly. He came because his English school had stopped teaching German and Saturday School was the only option for him. We wish all five of them good luck for the exam.

Inka and Miriam, two other students from the class,

started together in 2005 and have been in the same class for all these years. They have developed and improved their German and took their GCSE in 2015. Both will not return after Easter. They will take their GCSE exams in their other subjects in May and June and then take German as one of their three A level subjects at their English schools from September. That is another a typical Saturday School path.

Lupa, Milo, Alma, Raphie and Anton have decided against taking the A level exam this year as they want to prepare for the GCSE exams in their other subjects. They will hopefully move to Melanie's group and tackle their A level exams next year. It will be a somewhat sad goodbye as many of the students have been in the same class for many years and built friendships. "But I will definitely keep coming to Saturday School," says Anton. "It's important to me to sit the A level exam, even if I'd sometimes rather have a lie-in on a Saturday morning."



Annika's A level class taking a mock exam

Herbert only speaks German

A Parrot at Saturday School

A parrot called Herbert accompanies our teacher Felicitas' lessons and allows for fun and imaginative access to the German-language world. Felicitas Ader has been a teacher in Hackney Wick since 2016 and currently teaches the third-youngest class, children aged 5 and 6. She is originally from Munich and came to London to study art, graduating with a Master in Communication. At the German playgroup in East London she gained experience in early years' language education.



Herbert and his diary

Felicitas explains how she had the idea to introduce the feathered class mascot and his diary into lessons: "Since having my own two children it has become particularly important to me to support children's German language skills in a playful, creative and child-oriented manner. Herbert the Parrot is a glove puppet who has plenty in common with us; for example, he speaks German. But unlike us Herbert does not understand any English and therefore needs our help."

Felicitas wanted to create a figure which the children could develop a direct personal relationship with, and which could easily be thematically integrated into class dynamics. Every week, a child gets to take Herbert home and decide what to do with him. Mostly, these are everyday situations, for example eating a meal together or just playing together. Occasionally, Herbert is taken on larger adventures, such as a visit to grandparents in Germany or a holiday trip with the family. What's important is that it is fun and that the children, through photos, drawings or in words, document their experiences in Herbert's diary. At the beginning of the following lesson the child presents what they have been up to together throughout the past week. "Herbert came along when I had a haircut," says Astrid, 5 (all in German!). "We also went to the playground and to buy sweets."

The parrots' introduction has been a very positive

experience for Felicitas' class. Even children who are a little shy or don't have so much confidence speaking German feel encouraged to talk through use of the puppet and personal pictures from home. The diary also encourages the children to speculate as to what Herbert might have been doing in the week. Generally, the parrot can be incorporated into lesson topics in a variety of ways. Thus, Herbert received medical treatment from the children as part of a lesson on health and emotions. Of course, he also participated in the carnival celebrations, and he likes to play games such as "My right seat is free" (Mein rechter Platz ist frei). Herbert's diary also encourages the children to begin to write in German and Freddie, 6, proudly points out that "I wrote that myself".

Felicitas thinks that the following aspects are particularly important for children to successfully learn a language: "Children have to feel accepted, they have to listen to each other and to be able to empathise. That way they appreciate what they and others have in common. I wanted to enable my pupils to experience German lessons on a personal and child-oriented level and to encourage them to speak German. Children speak when they feel accepted and are interested in a subject.



Felicitas, her assistant Anna Müller and children from her class with Herbert

Although all of the children in my class speak German it can be a little tricky to answer in German, especially in the beginning. As the parrot does not speak or understand any English, the children are happy to help him to get along in everyday life. The puppet encourages the children to think about everyday situations. When speaking about these experiences, they acquire an abstract and complex vocabulary which helps them to communicate their thoughts on social and emotional events." The children in Felicitas' class love Herbert.

By Felicitas Ader and Martina Köpcke