

## FOREIGN LANGUAGE ASSISTANTS

### Joe Wake, British Council

The number of assistants working in Scottish schools in the year 2002-03 has risen to 246 (224 in 2001-02). The breakdown by Languages is:

French	156
German	62
Spanish	21
Italian	5

Altogether six more Local Authorities resumed employing foreign language assistants: Aberdeenshire, East Lothian, Highland, Perth and Kinross, South Ayrshire and Stirling. At least two others are likely to join next year. However, most of these new posts have been created using the new Modern Languages money from SEED, and this in turn brings with it the challenge of mainstreaming these improvements within three years.

Priorities vary – primary, secondary or a mixture of both? This is linked to the question of how many schools it is reasonable to allocate one assistant to work in.

There is some pressure from other National Offices to limit this to three schools, but this is based on experience at secondary level and some primary experiences in other countries which have not been very happy ones. Our view, and we are maintaining this strongly, is that Scotland should not be judged by what has gone wrong in other places. The defining criterion should be a balance of value for money for the employer and happy foreign language assistants. We will be discussing this throughout the year with colleagues who have assistants working in primary schools. We may have visitors from other countries who are interested to see how the system in Scotland is being managed.

A one-day conference was held in Kilmarnock last August to discuss a range of potential developments in relation to assistantships. The ideas explored were, for example, the possibility of someone to work with assistants encouraging their contribution to Scottish CILT's journal (SLR) and the possibility of drawing on the assistants' own and their schools' experiences to produce a new set of guidelines for deployment. We are taking forward some of these ideas during the current session.