

Vocab Express

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Are you looking for an easy to use but intellectually rigorous vocabulary online learning application? Stop digging and ditch the spade because I think I've found one that could save you a lot of time as you build students vocab knowledge and track their progress. It's called Vocab Express and it's a business-like, organised and interactive resource, which has been designed with the help of a number of leading Modern Foreign Language departments. As well as MFL, there are also lists for Key Stages 2-5 across a range of subjects including the sciences, geography, business studies, and classics.

So, how does it work? What Vocab Express does is combine text, images and audio to provide an engaging setting in which students can learn vocabulary and develop their knowledge and understanding of key words. Basically, students click on a subject and they are presented with a list of topics. I chose OCR

GCSE Spanish, Foundation Tier, Health and sport to practise my vocab in the Healthy Lifestyle section (ignoring the fact that I'd already had five coffees and some biscuits to compensate for a wasp sting I was nursing). You are presented with a list of words that you can click on and hear in an authentic native voice. Saying 'la avispa' didn't help my sting feel any better but it did make me wonder whether the jasper that got me was a Spanish wasp and I learnt the word pretty quickly. I went through a small list of nine words and listened to each one in turn before taking the plunge with a test. I got one out of nine on my first attempt, which I put down to trauma. The eight I got wrong were then presented again. On my next go I got two right, which was a vast improvement. Eventually after three more goes I had learnt my nine words and felt pretty chuffed – only for the computer to tell me I now had to complete a run of nine clear answers. I was hooked. I would not be beaten.

Vocab Express is a cracking way of learning new words, testing spellings, improving grammar and working on pronunciation by imitating native language speakers. It is made up of pre-categorised content from all the major exam board specifications and from the vocabulary spreads found in the course books of major publishers. All vocab is pre-loaded into consumable bite-sized chunks for easy learning on a simply presented and unfussy website.

There is intelligent answer matching so that a variety of answers are accepted for a particular word although my efforts didn't seem to match! There is a simple and user-friendly method for navigating textbook and exam board vocab lists.

Canny users of Vocab Express are likely to bring it into the classroom as a starter or plenary activity and for flexibly in the ICT suite enabling students to work at their own pace and at different levels. It's greatest use will come in independent study time with earphones attached.

One of the big plus features of Vocab Express is the ability to monitor student progress. The Teacher Monitoring Page allows you to view class and/or individual progress by accessing a scoreboard, colour-coded progress charts, and activity breakdown. There's no marking either, which means you can focus on helping children achieve their best by looking at what they have been struggling with.

There's a competitive element to Vocab Express, which has proved a big hit with those schools that use it. There is a running-total scoreboard so students can see their results on an ongoing basis and the very popular Vocab Express National Language Championships means that students can not only compete with each other but against other schools, which is a great motivator to aim high and do well.

As you would rightly expect, all MFL vocab lists have native speaker audio and Vocab Express has also completed a further major recording of files so that there will be 51,000 individual audio files available spanning 10 languages. Check out the new Arabic and Urdu resources, developed in response to the rise of international trade between Britain and Arab countries.

Grumbles? There aren't enough images for my liking so it's good to know that Vocab Express has a plan to add several thousand more in the next few months. More subjects are also needed; I think I'd either stick to MFL completely or go the whole hog – I'd love to see a maths vocab list.

Is it cheap? Well, it isn't bad. A course based licence is £160 a year and that includes access for everyone in the Key Stage. Vocab Express v2 is scheduled for release in September, which will include a

more flexible answer interpreter to include synonyms, a new dictation mode, a new method of vocab revision and new assignment module; and schools will also be able to run their own inter- and intra-school vocab championships. Definitely one to watch out for!

ARE YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY?

The Eccleshall Lecture Theatre at Dover College now seats around 100 students comfortably in this newly refurbished room. Dover College teaches students from ages 3-18 and has a fully functional lecture theatre following the installation of the i-Q lecture seating; a fixed structure

from Stage Systems with individual upholstered chairs on raised, tiered levels. The space can be used as a formal lecture theatre for teaching, for small drama groups and music performances, or even as a cinema. The

school also has alternative larger drama facilities in a former Methodist Church, but this is off site, so it is fantastic for the school to have this new on-facility that is easily accessible to the whole school. Find out more at stagesystems.co.uk (01509 611021, info@stagesystems.co.uk).



VERDICT:
more than words
 Vocab Express is an award winning intuitive vocab learning platform that gets a thumbs up from me as an efficient resource for building core vocabulary, which is fit for purpose both in and out of school.