House of Commons
Public Administration Select Committee

Official Language

Written Evidence

This is a volume of submissions, relevant to the inquiry into Official Language, which have been reported to the House but not yet approved for publication in final form. Any public use of, or reference to, the contents should make clear that it is not yet an approved final record of the written evidence received by the Committee.

List of written evidence

Memorandum from Richard Taylor (OL 01)

I am writing in response to your call for examples of the Government's poor use of language.

I would like to draw your attention to the HMRC's description of their online forms for self assessment taxation as software:

http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/sa/software.htm[1]

I feel that the use of the word "software", while not technically inaccurate, suggests that software has to be downloaded and run on the users' computer. This confusion is amplified by the fact that the HMRC directly compare their "software", which is in reality an online form, with commercial software which has to be purchased and installed on the users' computer.

One cannot easily find out that the HMRC "software" is in fact simply an online form until after signing up for the service.

I believe that if this was corrected then more people would fill in their self-assessment tax forms online, which ought, assuming rational systems being in place, reduce the costs of collecting tax. I have written to the HMRC many times on this point. I have never had a reply, but they have on occasion started using the term "online software" perhaps as a minor, insufficient, effort to act on the suggestion.

Other commonly used phrases which exemplify poor use of language by the Government:

* Anti-Social Behaviour; this is too often used to refer to real crimes (such as driving scooters without helmets, licenses or insurance) as well as criminal damage. It results in such offences being unreasonably treated together with things some consider problematic such as youths gathering outside shops on their way home from school.

* Specially Trained Units; non-firearms police officers who are to be trained in the use of the TASERs they are soon to be issued with are described as "Specially Trained Units", often abbreviated to STUs. This is misleading as it suggests these officers have had more training with TASER and experience of situations where force might need to be used than is the case. STUs are individual normal response police officers who have been issued a TASER and given a few hours training on its use.

* Laid before Parliament; this process is not what it sounds like. Having secondary legislation "laid before Parliament" does not mean it is discussed, debated and

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[1] See appendix

approved by both houses of Parliament. Often government ministers and departments imply that is what it does mean, and this is very misleading. In practice though there is no debate, and "laid before Parliament" doesn't even mean published and drawn attention to on the Parliamentary website. As far as I can tell the usual procedure is for the "Merits of Statutory Instruments Committee" to determine "that the special attention of the House need not be drawn to [the secondary legislation]" which is then considered approved without debate or a vote. There does not appear to be an accessible procedure for MPs to force a debate and vote.

* Regional Assembly; suggests a body of elected individuals, however many members are unelected.

* Television Licence; "Television Licences" are required for all equipment capable of watching live TV, this now includes many computers, mobile phones and other devices so the term is now out of line with technology.

* Investment; the Government far too often uses the term "Investment" when in-fact what is being described is spending.

March 2009

Appendix – HMRC 'software you can use for your tax return' webpage

Software you can use for your tax return

When you file online your figures are calculated automatically and you'll know right away what you owe or what is owed to you. You can use our free Self Assessment Online software or commercial software (some are also free). Some supplementary pages aren't supported by our service, but are provided by commercial software.

- What's covered by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) free, online service
- What's covered by commercial software
- Filing trust and estate returns online
- Completing your online tax return in parts
- Before you can send us your tax return online
- Tax returns you can't file online
- HMRC online support

What's covered by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) free, online service

You can send us the main Self Assessment Tax Return (SA100) online free of charge using our online service. You can also file the following supplementary pages online now:

- Employment
- Self-employment
- Individual partnership - to report your share of a partnership's profit or loss
- UK property
- Capital Gains
- Foreign

As well as sending your tax return online you can view and/or amend your contact details online and use a secure email channel to ask us a question (see 'HMRC online support' below). You can also see your latest Statement of Account and account history online to find out:

- what you owe, what you've paid and any repayments due
- when your tax return was received
- when your next tax return is due

Bear in mind that our software only offers the supplementary pages listed above. If you want to send other pages online you'll need to use commercial software (see 'What's covered by commercial software' below).
HMRC's Self Assessment online filing service - find out more about the benefits and how to register

What's covered by commercial software

You can file the following tax returns online using software from commercial suppliers (some of this software is free and some you have to pay for):

- SA100 - Individual Tax Return (also completed if you're self-employed)
- SA800 - The Partnership Tax Return
- SA900 - The Trust and Estate Tax Return (see 'Filing trust and estate returns online' below)

The commercial software products also allow you to file some or all of the following supplementary pages online:

- Employment
- Self-employment
- Individual partnership
- UK property
- Additional information
- Foreign income
- Trust income
- Capital Gains
- Non-residence

- Minister of religion
- Lloyd's underwriters

Follow the link below for a list of commercial software that we have tested and that is compatible with our Self Assessment online filing service. We don't recommend any one particular product or service over another, so you'll have to choose for yourself. When you compare suppliers, you could look at things such as their extra features, ease of use and quality of support.

List of commercial software compatible with Self Assessment online

Filing trust and estate returns online

The system for filing trust and estate returns online is slightly different from other methods of Self Assessment online. Find out more by following the link below.

The Trust and Estate Tax Return: paper or online

Completing your online tax return in parts

You don't have to fill in your online tax return all in one go. You can fill in part of it then save it and come back later. You can also print it out if you want to.

If you use HMRC software, your work is saved securely on our system. Only you will be able to get at it, no one else (inside or outside HMRC) can look at your return until you've submitted it.

If you use commercial software, you may be able to save your work on your own computer. If this feature's important to you, check that it's available before you choose your software.

Before you can send us your tax return online

Whichever software you choose, before you can send us your tax return online, you'll need to register and enrol to use the online service - allow at least seven days to do this. You'll need to have your Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR) to hand (find this on your tax return or Statement of Account) plus either your National Insurance number or your postcode.

For full details please see our article 'Self Assessment Online'. If you wish to register and enrol now you can use the link below.

Self Assessment Online - find out more about the benefits and how to register

Self Assessment online - register and enrol now

Tax returns you can't file online

There is currently no software available for filing the following returns:

- SA700 - Non-resident Company Tax Return
- SA970 - Trustees of Registered Pension Schemes

You have to send us these as paper returns. Because there is no online service available, the deadline for these paper returns is the same as for online returns - 31 January.

Self assessment deadlines - find out more

Self Assessment for trustees of registered pensions schemes

HMRC online support

The Online Services Helpdesk supports HMRC's software (but not software from other suppliers). You can contact the helpdesk by phone on 0845 6055 999 or by minicom on 0845 366 7805. It is open seven days a week from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm (closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day). You can also contact the helpdesk by email at the address below:

helpdesk@ir-efile.gov.uk

Memorandum from Will Cooper (OL 02)

In response to Tony Wright's request in today's Guardian for examples of 'bad language' from the public sector, I'd like to nominate the entire lexicon surrounding the Private Finance Initiative (which in itself would be better described as part-privatisation).

I understand that the subject is a complex one that requires its own internal lingo, but I feel strongly that the public simply don't know what it is, let alone understand the political principles underlying it, largely because the language used to describe its workings is so eye-wateringly arcane. I would even venture to suggest that this may be one of the prime objectives of PFI; some of the terminology is purposefully euphemistic, the upshot being that the public have neither the confidence nor the understanding to question its mechanics or its prevalence. The result is that, just as the financial figures for PFI are off the balance-sheet, so are the principles behind it, masked by endless layers of meaningless verbiage.

Any documents to which the public have access on this subject should, in my opinion, be vastly simplified. This includes documents available to, but not targeted specifically at, the public, since often viewing these is the only way one can glean detailed information about what is going on with PFI.

A few examples:

'public-private partnerships' - implies, I think, that the public sector has a far more central role in running PFI projects than it actually does

'the Third Way' - ambiguous, hazy and (I suspect) designed to stifle further conversation since it presumes everyone knows what it's supposed to represent

'identify additional capital resources' - spend more taxpayers' money

'significant capital expenditure' - a lot of taxpayers' money

'independent sector involvement in the provision of public services' - private companies will run our hospitals and schools

'modernisation programme' - back-door privatisation

'increased PFI deal flow' - more privatisation, and faster

'PFI credits' - money from central government to allow them to purchase services from the private sector that they wouldn't get otherwise

'lower revenue expenditure'; 'increased efficiency' - cost-cutting

'conventional procurement' - i.e. non-privatised public-sector projects

'risk transfer strategy' - measures to ensure that the public won't lose out should the project collapse

'infrastructure support solutions'; 'facilities management services' - pay us to run your council/school/hospital for you

'SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle)' - a company created solely to allow a PFI project to go ahead

'DBFO (Design, Build, Finance, Operate) schemes' - in which complete control of every aspect of a (supposedly) public building is given to a private contractor

'optimism bias' - unblinkingly accepting the notion that the lowest cost outcome is inherently the most desirable

One sample from the Treasury's news pages (the first paragraph is nigh indecipherable to the average member of the public) is appended to this memorandum.

The language surrounding the move to PFI has inevitably contributed to the fact that those of us who use public services (i.e. all of us) are being 'rebranded' from citizens or residents to 'customers'. This implies some kind of cosy business arrangement between us and our public bodies, when actually the emphasis should be on statutory duty. Rather than building schools, hospitals and leisure centres we now 'procure projects' in a way that emphasises a business venture aimed at profit, rather than the state's responsibility for public welfare. It has also resulted in a complete lack of transparency - to get to the bottom of what PFI is and means requires a lot of painstaking research, when the facts should be there in plain English so we can decide whether or not we agree with them. I am sure you have detected a general political bias against PFI in my argument here, which I freely declare; but I hope you will also recognise that the sort of language used on this subject prohibits the public from forming any opinion on the scheme, one way or the other.

April 2009

Appendix – HM Treasury Press Release – 14 July 2009

TREASURY TASKFORCE PFI STANDARD CONTRACT GUIDANCE LAUNCHED

A platform for generating increased Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deal flow and reducing the costs of tendering will be the outcome of new contract guidelines published by the Treasury Taskforce, Chief Secretary to the Treasury Alan Milburn said today.

The new contract guidelines will act as a blueprint for the future development of PFI and ensure that future PFI contracts across different public services will be able to follow a consistent approach by incorporating standard conditions into the contracts.

Mr Milburn said:

"Consultation with hundreds of interested parties has produced guidance which provides the public sector with a practical toolkit for delivering the very best value to the taxpayer. The guidance will avoid the pitfalls of the past - where the public sector, let alone those in the private sector, have had to re-invent the wheel at considerable expense every time a hospital or a college entered into a PFI arrangement.

"The challenge for both the public and the private sectors - now that the road is clear - is to expand the PFI. We want to see more deals done. We want to see PFI working in sectors like further education where it has not worked before. And we want to see it making an even greater contribution to producing modern public services that are shaped around the needs of the public.

"We must now use the PFI to drive forward the Government's modernisation programme for our public services. We do not want to see business as usual in our public services. We want to see change for the better. The PFI is part and parcel of that change process."

The Treasury Taskforce contract standardisation guidance marks the end of two years work involving consultation with literally hundreds of stakeholders. The contract standardisation guidance has already commanded a great deal of positive comment in the market.

Memorandum from Paul Goodman MP (OL 03)

Thank you for your letter of 1 April about the Public Administration Select Committee's inquiry into official language.

I attach a copy of a letter that the Speaker received from Hazel Blears, the Communities Secretary, in answer to persistent queries that I'd raised in correspondence and on the floor of the House about how exactly this year's allocation of £12 million of Preventing Violence Extremism money is being spent. You'll see that the third paragraph of the Secretary of State's letter appears to say that the department has no record, but is now compiling one.

I offer her letter to the select committee as a particularly bad example of official language - though it was an example, presumably, from the point of view of Sir Humphrey.

April 2009

Appendix – letter from Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP to Speaker of the House, March 2009

I wanted to write to you to follow up the point of order raised by Paul Goodman on 11th March, concerning responses to the correspondence about funding to prevent violent extremism.

Paul Goodman wrote to me on 15th January noting that we had previously provided him with information about the Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund in Spring 2008 and asking for corresponding details for the current period. I replied on 3rd March, noting that the Pathfinder Fund had existed in 2007/08 and that funding was now provided through the Area Based Grant—a non ring-fenced grant fund which allows local authorities to decide the most effective and efficient routes to invest their resources for the delivery of local priorities. Copies of the correspondence and relevant PQs are enclosed.[2]

Because of this change it is not possible for me to provide a list of funded projects in precisely the same format as in Spring 2008. However, we have been working closely with Government Offices, the Office for Security and Counter-terrorism and with our local partners to deliver this agenda and to collate information setting out progress on the development of local partnerships and action plans. This includes information on engagement, including detail about which community groups are funded for leading local projects.

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[2] Not printed

I am, of course, content to share the information set out above. I believe it would make sense to do so after the end of the financial year and will therefore write to him around the end of April providing this detail. I hope he finds this helpful.

I am also happy to build on the briefing he received from Sadiq Khan MP and officials recently, which touched on this issue, by meeting him again to provide further explanation of the local government finance system and the local government performance framework.

A copy of this letter goes to Paul Goodman MP and the Leader of the House of Commons.

Memorandum from Adan Ali (OL 04)

In P&W Dept. 'Direct Payment' means completely different than 'Direct Payment' in LGC.

April 2009

Memorandum from Alex Stobart (OL 05)

I read your request in the Guardian following an article by Andrew Sparrow. Unfortunately his e-mail address is not easy to find.

The government writing I find difficulty is where I live in Edinburgh. There is a City Literacy and Numeracy Partnership in the city called CLAN.

Their services are offered to some of the 36% of men and 39% of women in Scotland who have difficulties reading and writing.

However the booklet that describes the services is nearly 90 pages long, and full of the most difficult words you will ever see (thus in my opinion alienating their audience straightaway).

April 2009

Memorandum from Rt Hon David Blunkett MP (OL 07)

Re: Inquiry into Official Language

Thanks for the circular in relation to the 'language' used by the Civil Service.

We're looking out some classic letters – although we will obviously have to eliminate names of both the constituent and also the Minister (in order to avoid complete embarrassment).

There is of course, some entertaining language which you'll have come across. The Civil Service always use the term 'delighted' for just about anything that Ministers are asked to do – which completely takes away any meaning for the word at all! I used to eliminate it from all my letters and reports.

They also have wonderful phrases like 'stand ready' which actually means we're doing nothing about this unless we're absolutely forced to do so!

April 2009

Memorandum from Paul Flynn MP, member of the Committee (OL 08)

Introduction

The use of jargon - bad language - in business and politics is nothing new. John Betjeman nailed it in his poem *Executive*:

> You ask me what it is I do. Well, actually, you know,
> I'm partly a liaison man, and partly P.R.O.
> Essentially, I integrate the current export drive
> And basically I'm viable from ten o'clock till five.

But with the advent of new Labour, the tendency towards using jargon has proliferated exponentially to the point that official communications are now largely incomprehensible. If we take **Best Practice**, as an example, this phrase now appears as a matter of course in policy documents, regulation, legislation and guidelines for almost every conceivable situation. A blog recently commentated:

> According to the Wikipedia, *Best Practice* is a management idea which asserts that there is a technique, method, process, activity, incentive or reward that is more effective at delivering a particular outcome than any other technique, method, process, etc. The idea is that with proper processes, checks, and testing, a project can be rolled out and completed with fewer problems and unforeseen complications.

Yes, just as you and I suspected, it's yet another form of modernspeak designed to state the obvious, and give those stating the obvious an air of undeserved authority. It has found its way into both political and management jargon, and it is completely meaningless.

Would anyone knowingly pursue the route of worst practice?

In 2001 the Government introduced legislation designed "to enable provision to be made for the purpose of reforming legislation which has the effect of imposing burdens affecting persons in the carrying on of any activity and to enable codes of practice to be made with respect to the enforcement of restrictions, requirements or conditions."

The problem with the legislation is that it was so infested with the jargon of regulation that it was virtualy incomprehensible to anyone but the parliamentary draughtsmen who wrote it, (perhaps not even to them) and in 2006 the Act was repealed by the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act.

Not content with fouling up the English language the practitioners then decided to rename the DTI the BERR – the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform. The BERR Website announces:

IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE
OF REGULATORS

- A Code of Practice for national and local regulators was passed by Parliament on 26 November 2007 and will come in to force in April 2008. This makes it legally binding that regulators ensure inspection and enforcement is efficient, both for the regulators themselves and those they regulate.

- To assess how regulators are performing in delivering proportionate enforcement to ensure compliance, the Better Regulation Executive has worked with the National Audit Office and regulators to develop a review framework published in May 2007. Five major regulators have been reviewed – the Health and Safety Executive, Food Standards Agency, Financial Services Authority, the Environment Agency and the Office of Fair Trading. Reports on each of the regulators will be published in February 2008….

- The Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Bill was introduced to Parliament in November 2007, and if passed, will modernise the penalty regimes which regulators use by giving them access to flexible, efficient and proportionate administrative sanctions.

The following extracts from the House of Commons Business Plan 2008-09 show how the use of meaningless official language has infiltrated the Commons itself.

House of Commons Business Plan 2008-09 is produced by the Office of the Chief Executive (OCE).

The Chief Executive and Clerk of the House is Dr Malcolm Jack .

<u>Extract 1</u>

This extract from the Business Plan concerns planning for "business resilience" and "risk management" within the House (that is to say how well the House is protected from a terrorist or other attack and how it could continue after such an attack).

<u>3.5   Objective 5</u>

To ensure that good practice in risk management and business resilience planning is embedded across the House Service.

Business areas concerned:

3.5.1 **Risk facilitation**

3.5.2 **Business resilience planning**

3.5.3 **Internal Audit**

3.5.1 **Risk facilitation**

3.5.1.1 FY 2007/08: current year progress

This year, there has been a re-focus on enhancing risk management activities within the House. The aim has been to match public service standards in risk management by providing support to the Management Board in its management of risk. Progress includes:

- Regular updates on corporate risk management provided to the Management Board.

- Risk Management moved to the OCE with effect from January 2008 to strengthen the independence and authority of the risk management process.

- Assistant risk management facilitator appointed from January 2008.

- Regular review of departmental risk registers have taken place during the year; in most cases departmental risk registers have continued to develop whilst taking on board any Management Board recommendations made during the year.

3.5.1.2 FY 2008/09: objectives

- **To gain the Management Board's approval for, and then implement, an improved risk management strategy and process, which fits the House and is in line with best practice adopted elsewhere in the public sector**

Measures

Risk Management policy, principles and guidance to be documented, published and communicated to staff by Sept 2008.

Regular liaison with HM Treasury on a quarterly basis to ensure the risk management policy remains up to date and relevant.

- **To ensure a risk management system is embedded within business processes, allowing for risks to be escalated up and down the organisation as necessary**

Measures

Regular quarterly meetings with the corporate risk owners (Director Generals) to review risks.

Departments have up-to-date risk registers based upon functional areas, with any departmental cross-cutting risks identified.

Feedback from Departments.

Sufficient assurance is available to meet the requirements of the statement of internal control (SIC) for the Administration Account.

Risk management to be included within the various management training programmes by September 2008.

Satisfactory outcome of next internal audit of risk management in 2009/10.

3.5.1.3 FY 2008/09: work planned

- Risk management process: to continue to develop the House risk management system ensuring that processes are in place for risks to be actively managed and escalated as appropriate through the organisation.

- Facilitator: to continue to actively support the Management Board and departments in their risk management process.

- Risk management policy statement/document: ensure the House has a published risk management policy document.

- Communication: to communicate RM policy to key stakeholders via risk "roadshows", intranet, user friendly guides etc.

- Corporate risk review: undertake a review of current corporate risks to ensure they remain relevant in light of the recent changes in corporate strategy with particular focus on corporate risk 4 relating to organisational and cultural change.

- Linking corporate & departmental risk management process: draw closer linkages between corporate and departmental risk management registers; ensuring local departmental/operational risks are identified as well as corporate related risks.

- Departmental risk registers 08/09: Re-align risk registers to reflect the new unified structure, ensure any management action identified is 'SMART', link in with performance measurements. Simplify reporting and monitoring of risks by using risk heat maps to provide a quick visual summary of the critical risks faced by a department.

- Embed risk management: to ensure that risk management is a fully integrated part of business planning and performance management within the new organisational structure.

3.5.2 Business Resilience Planning

3.5.2.1 FY 2007/08 progress

- Business Continuity project officer appointed to facilitate creation of standard Parliament-wide Business Continuity plans adaptable to a range of likely

contingencies. The work has concentrated on "sub disaster risks" such as the loss of all or part of any building, denial of normal office facilities or staff. Work by the Serjeant-at-Arms on disaster Recovery planning has continued in parallel.

- The establishment of a Parliamentary Business Continuity Policy Steering Group chaired by the Clerk of the Journals, House of Commons.

- Preparation of twenty eight departmental Business Continuity plans, in standard format, which will be taken forward in 2008/09 for further iterations and rehearsals.

- Appointment of a part time consultant to assist in the BC process and a further appointment of a consultancy firm to validate work to date and assist in the delivery of 2008/09 objectives.

3.5.2.2 FY 2008/09 objectives.

- **To ensure that departmental business continuity plans are prepared to a recognised standard, reflect best practice and are consistent across Parliament, with a disciplined and effective update process.**

3.6.1.2 FY 2008/09: objectives

- **To deliver systematic review and evaluation of risk management, control and governance through the annual risk based audit programme, in order to give assurance to the Clerk as Accounting Officer, Management Board and Audit Committees on the management of risk and the effectiveness of internal controls and governance processes.**

Measure

Delivery of the audit plan (completion of 90% agreed audits in audit plan, to draft report stage).

Extract 2

This second extract concerns "internal audit" of "the business". What the business is is not clear.

To add value to the organisation through the Internal Audit process, ensuring the Audit Plan meets the needs of the business and is based on risk

Measures

60% of audit hours spent on high risk areas as agreed and documented in the audit plan.

Agreement of audit committees and Management Board to the audit plan, before start of Audit plan year.

Greater than 70% positive response in client satisfaction interviews.

3.6.1.3 FY 2008/09: work planned

The IAU has already agreed a basis for cooperative working on assurance of services shared with the House of Lords. There is also a new desire on the part of the National Audit Office (NAO) to work more closely with internal audit which has been launched by the joint planning of future audit activities. This will mean information will be shared to a greater extent than hitherto and should enable each assurance partner to rely on the work of the other.

Internally we are working with the new Parliamentary Director of Estates to establish links between his directorate and internal audit. The objective is for project governance to include an assurance role covering time, quality and cost. In this way the IAU will, in due course, receive assurance on individual major projects and collective assurance on minor projects.

The concept could also be applied to other areas such as IT, but first there needs to be confidence that the new approach will be thorough, independent and objective. If this can be achieved the IAU will create a library of project assurance evidence that it will use in formulating an overall opinion on project controls. This approach could provide a more efficient way of gathering project assurance evidence, enable a broader coverage of project risks and redirect internal audit review work from the projects themselves to the evidence gathering processes.

The concept of the IAU gathering evidence from other assurance providers forms the foundation of a model for internal audit's future development as it is presently envisaged. The model assumes that internal audit will collect and take account of a wide range of assurance evidence in formulating opinions on internal controls on an enterprise wide and category basis, for example on governance, projects and financial management.

Looking ahead: The medium and longer term

On the Members' side there is a clear and growing pressure for more transparency and tighter controls on allowances that could further impact on the scope and governance of internal audit as well as its relationship with Members.

On the Administration side there is an optimism that the new structure will enable better services to be provided to Members. In parallel the initiatives to improve and professionalise management will demand a more systematic and risk based approach to internal audit combined with an increased need for flexibility to respond to changing priorities and emerging risks. To facilitate this internal audit will need to have closer relations with decision making bodies and better information about projects and initiatives. In return IA will have to provide clear advice and opinion and new ways of communicating these to senior management groups.

Internal audit is also working very closely with the risk facilitators to ensure that the development of new risk management processes and internal audit develop in

harmony.

April 2009

Re; Inquiry into official language

Thank you for your letter of 1st April. I enclose a copy of the phrase that was used in a response to me regarding a constituent from the CSA; this left us both at a loss from what was expected of my constituent.

As you can see the top is headed 'our questions'; which of the statements do you think constitute a question?!

April 2009

Appendix – letter from the Child Support Agency to Andrew Miller MP's constituent

Our questions

We originally asked you for details of your income in our latest letter dated 19/08/08. Our records show that we received a letter and also a wage slip from your partner. Unfortunately this information appears to have gone astray.

To ensure progress of the change of circumstance review I contacted your employer and requested wage details for weeks 18/07/08 – 15/08/08 inclusive, I also contacted your partner's employer and requested income details for August and September 2008. This income information for you and your partner covers the relevant week of this assessment which is 11/08/08 – 17/08/08.

The information has now been returned and shows that you had an average income of £337.42 after deductions for tax, national insurance and half of the weekly pension contributions you make. All 5 weeks details included overtime and therefore is considered regular income.

During conversations with yourself you intimated that your income was lower than this, to ensure that you receive a correct assessment please supply wage slips showing the reduction in your income that you referred to. You will need to send 5 consecutive wage slips from when your income reduced after the period advised of above.

If you have any queries regarding this please feel free to contact me on the above number between 08.00 and 16.00 Monday to Friday until 17/04/09.

Failure to provide the above information will result in an assessment being completed using the above net income and not taking into consideration any reduction in net income that may have since occurred.

<p align="center">**Memorandum from Roger Gale MP (OL 10)**</p>

Inquiry into Official Language

The accompanying Health Authority leaflet epitomises, I think, the worst of both Government initiatives and language!

I see small point in selecting a particular phrase from this document which is total in its awfulness!

With my best wishes.

April 2009

Appendix – Extracts of letter from Department of Health to Roger Gale MP

<u>Pacesetters programme - local NHS Trusts</u>

I am writing to inform you that Eastern & Coastal Kent PCT in your constituency is participating in a Department of Health led initiative called Pacesetters.

Pacesetters aims to tackle inequalities in health services and in the workplace arising out of discrimination and disadvantage. The programme is founded on a robust evidence base and evaluation strategy. Its projects are developed through co-design with communities and delivered through a service improvement methodology. (See Overview for further details.) It is important to emphasise that the methodology is based on testing new approaches on a small scale to identify what works and what does not work.

18 Trusts across 6 Strategic Health Authorities participated in the first wave. Some example(s) are attached.

1. Local example(s) from your area
2. Overview of the Pacesetters programme for Wave 2 sites
3. Frequently Asked Questions
4. Selection criteria and application form for Wave 2 sites
5. Wave 2 Matrix of Change Ideas

We anticipate that most interventions worked on will be for a period of one year after which successful innovations will be mainstreamed into the work of the trusts and spread nationally. This will ensure long-term sustainability of equality and diversity into core business.

<u>**Example(s) of Improvement Stories From Your Region**</u>

Spiritual needs assessment project
Surrey and Borders Partnership Foundation Trust

The Spiritual Needs Assessment project at the Abraham Cowley Unit in Chertsey is focusing on developing a Spiritual Needs Assessment process so that mental health services can more effectively respond to the spiritual and religious needs of service users. This project is not only focused on faith but includes non-believers and people with interests that have a significant influence on their lives.

The team have begun to roll out Spiritual Needs Assessment on one ward and two members of nursing staff have been trained to use the assessment tool and form. Work is also being carried out to improve the design of the "tool" for the spiritual needs assessment. Workshops and training sessions have been held for hospital staff and faith practitioners to raise awareness of the tool. The project lead has given presentations to other staff to encourage its wider use and adoption. An important objective for the project was to include Spiritual/cultural needs as a separate section the new CPA; this has now been achieved.

Participation and engagement

Community participation is a significant element of the programme. SHAs and their Trusts work in partnership with local populations, patients and service users to design innovative models of community participation. (Each Wave 2 site will link with an original Pacesetters site in their area in order to learn about the processes of being involved in Pacesetters).

International Faculty

As part of the programme, an International Advisory Faculty has been established, comprising a group of international advisors who offer leading-edge thinking across the six equality strands. One of their key roles is to identify innovative solutions currently in place in other countries that are having a positive impact to intractable problems in relation to health inequalities and the six equality strands. Four International Faculty events have been held on topics such as community engagement, disability and race.

Evaluation

It is essential that the programme aims, and innovations in each SHA and trust, are evaluated so that outcomes can be identified and lessons learnt. It is also important

that the service improvement methodology underpinning the programme is evaluated. Each SHA has appointed an evaluation team to evaluate the local changes in its area. DH has also appointed a research programme manager to manage a robust overall evaluation.

Selection Criteria and Rationale for Proposed Sites

We expect interested NHS organisations that want to participate in **the Programme to demonstrate how they fulfill the following essential and desirable criteria:**

Essential Elements

• Community Involvement and Participation: Pacesetters is a programme that is founded on meaningful community engagement. NHS organisations need to demonstrate what process they have in place or are planning to develop to engage with the widest community demographics as possible. They need to demonstrate how this engagement is or will be, shaping their policies and services.

• Trust Board Commitment: It is expected that the participating NHS organisation will nominate a Pacesetter lead at Executive Director Level to assist in both the delivery and dissemination of the programme internally and externally and link it to the mainstream business of the organisation.

• Partnership working: We are looking for NHS organisations that can show positive partnership working practices and behaviours with its diverse communities, the Department of Health, local NHS and the community and voluntary sector stakeholders.

• Legal compliance: Pacesetter sites will also be expected to work comprehensively towards achieving equality and diversity legal compliance

• Current Equality and Diversity Position: Pacesetter sites should reflect a broad spectrum of progress across the six equality strands. Sites may be a mix of those organisations that are committed to the agenda and/or have already made some progress or those that are struggling but are committed to the equality agenda.

Desirable Elements

• Buddying Process: To engage a wider audience, spread the learning and increase capacity of the programme, other NHS organisations will be encouraged to shadow and work with participating sites It will be particularly useful if an interested Trust is able to suggest or identify possible partnership with another NHS 'buddy' site or

already have these arrangements in place.

Introduction

As a research centre addressing the problem of over-complex information, we welcome your inquiry into official language.

We don't believe you will be short of examples of jargon, so instead of providing more, we would like to draw attention to some wider issues such as the causes and costs of poor communication.

Different sorts of jargon

Official language (like other sorts of writing) can suffer from jargon and difficulty for various reasons:

• technical terms used to communicate to a non-technical public

• familiar words, misunderstood because they are being used in a specialised sense

• a long, rarer (usually Latin-based) word used where a short, familiar (usually Anglo-Saxon-based) word would do just as well

• euphemisms designed to avoid blunt references to difficult subjects

• worn out clichés (especially management ones) which irritate, even if we know perfectly well what they mean

• long sentences with complex structures, so that we've forgotten the beginning by the time we reach the end

• poorly structured text – such as when concepts are explained in a different part of the document from where they are used

• documents that become bloated because they attempt to cover all circumstances

• lack of visual design to help people understand the structure of a document and read it strategically

Underlying causes of jargon

Although good documents often look as if they were easy to write, clear writing is actually a highly skilled task. Government employs a large number of communications specialists, but traditionally defines communications largely in terms of either media relations or public information campaigns. Things like forms, guidance, and financial statements are the communications that actually deliver services to individual citizens, but they are usually the responsibility of operational departments.

The need for skills

In our experience, the people who have the job of writing public information documents are often untrained, or minimally trained, and little relevant training is actually available to them. Information writers often work at a junior level and do not feel able to challenge text written by senior people, and legal specialists in particular. In some cases, information documents intended for the public have to include forms of words that come directly from legislation.

The cost of poor information

Poorly designed information is enormously costly – error-prone forms have to be returned and corrected, and needless enquiries are made to government helplines. These costs are rarely addressed in reviews of potential savings, but we believe they are considerable. So investing in document design, training and user-testing is well worthwhile.

We hope that by highlighting good as well as bad examples of official language the Committee will be successful in sparking a debate on how to raise standards further. We would welcome the opportunity to be a part of that debate.

About the Simplification Centre

The Simplification Centre is a new research centre established at the University of Reading, funded by the university and by member organisations (typically government departments, and large financial services companies). It is staffed by people who have combined careers in research and practice, with many years of experience in simplifying and testing information documents.

You can find more information about the Centre at www.reading.ac.uk/simplification. We run a research programme, and offer our members services that include document appraisal, training and seminars.

April 2009

Memorandum from Philip Morgan (OL 12)

I have today (1 May) heard via the Local Government Association (LGA), the Hampshire CC and my charity work of your brave expedition into the jungle of jargon. So I'm a day late in responding. But I have something vital to say.

The LGA seem to have got lost in the jungle very quickly indeed!! Their contribution is muddled in the extreme.

Here are some words they are suggesting councils don't use because they are jargon: taxonomy, re-baselining, mainstreaming, holistic governance, contestability, predictors of beaconicity, synergies. (Source: HCC Hampshire Children's Trust Newsletter, Spring 2009)

This list shows a clear failure to understand what jargon is.

The list consists of perfectly good and acceptable English words that most people don't know PLUS invented words or phrases which people outside the loop can't be expected to understand. In other words, the list consists of English words and jargon. It is not a list solely of jargon.

It probably doesn't even include all the main types of jargon anyway!! A major cause of jargon is where the meaning of a perfectly ordinary and clear English word is changed to some different and special meaning that nobody else understands—and which of course laymen try to understand in its normal dictionary meaning. As I've not had time to think about this subject properly I can only think of one example: In March Hampshire CC produced a young carers strategy and action plan. I asked a military man and my dictionary what a strategy is; it is a "Plan of Action". So HCC have just published simultaneously in the same binding a Plan of Action and an Action Plan. The strategy is not a strategy anyway: so the two parts of the document appear to be different. But clearly, the normal English word "strategy" with a perfectly clear meaning has been used to mean something else, without anybody noticing. This is probably the worst type of jargon, as you rightly assume you understand what is being said, but in fact you don't!

At least with "governance" you know you're up against a new word, in fact a dictionary word, but little used and with the same meaning as government. When you try hard and can't distinguish its meaning from "government", you know you're into jargon! I'd be interested to know if you can explain the difference—especially as you're one of the wisest people in Parliament! (I know flattery gets you nowhere—but I do have a high regard for your views and judgement.)

I hope this helps, but it seems absolutely clear that the LGA doesn't understand the subject. They're even trying to get people to play jargon bingo—how trite—talk about

the blind leading the blind!

My sudden contact with this subject tells me that the same intellectual failure that produces jargon is being applied to a vain attempt to remove it!! I know you will bring some sense to it all!

Bon courage!

May 2009

Memorandum from Phil Willis MP (OL 13)

I am pleased to hear that the Public Administration Select Committee is currently investigating the Government's use of language. This is an issue that my committee also feels strongly about. As such, I have enclosed a copy of the DIUS Annual Report 2008, which we felt was a prime example of the misuse of language, and the IUSS committee's corresponding report.[3] I hope you find this useful.

April 2009

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[3] Not printed. Documents available at:
http://www.dius.gov.uk/policy/~/media/publications/2/21390%20AIR%20Report%20AW%20Complete and
http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmdius/51/51i.pdf

Memorandum from Andrew George MP (OL 14)

Thank you for your letter of 1ˢᵗ April and I apologise for the delay in replying.

I think we have the right to expect the Information Commissioner's Office to set the highest standards in communication and information.

However, I enclose a copy of a recent exchange of correspondence with them which I believe illustrates a problem of formulaic letter construction.

I am sure that others can provide for you plenty of examples from the Department for Work and Pensions which more often than not leave our constituents goggle-eyed and with a sore head!

Hope this helps.

May 2009

Appendix 1

Letter from Andrew George MP to the Information Commissioner's Office, 20 January 2009

Thank you for your letter of 14ᵗʰ January 2009.

Am I the only person confused by the style of this letter? You first refer to information you require to "progress your complaint". In the next sentence you tell me that "your case has now been closed" and in the following sentence you tell me that "your complaint can be reopened".

You may wish to review whether you are being drawn in to gobbledegook!

The information you request is enclosed.

Appendix 2

Letter from the Information Commissioner's Office to Andrew George MP, 14 January 2009

Information request to Ministry of Justice (MOJ).

Thank you for your correspondence dated 12 December 2008 in which you complain

about the response you received from MOJ.

So we can progress your complaint we need you to provide copies of the following:

- Your initial request for information to MOJ

Your case has now been closed as there is no further action we are able to take without the documents we have requested. We require these documents as:

- It provides us with a full set of unedited evidence in support of the complaint

- It is necessary to provide a copy of the initial request to the public authority when we first notify them of having received a complaint

Once we receive the information we have requested your complaint can be reopened.

Please quote the reference number on the top of this letter in any further correspondence.