

Plain English

The voice of Plain English Campaign

Issue 86 Winter 2016

Plain English judgement



It explains what has led to their father's arrest and imprisonment – for attempting to buy weapons – and how they were falsely promised a trip to Disneyland, Paris, as part of a plot to instead take them to Syria. It cleverly gets across how their father manipulated their mother, and why their father is a risk to them. Here is part of the judgement, written in a way the children can easily understand.

“Children can't be taken away from their parents unless social services prove to a judge that it would be harmful for them to live at home. If children are taken away, judges will always try to return them if that is safe. Children are not taken away from their parents simply because the parents have lied about something. Even if they do tell lies they can still be good enough parents. People can tell lies about some things and still tell the truth about other things. Also, children are not taken away because parents are rude or difficult or because they have strange views, even if those views offend people. The only reason to take children away is because they need protecting from harm.”

Mr Jackson's efforts have been widely applauded in the media and have proved to be a Twitter sensation. We can only add our voice to those lining up to pay tribute.

We're all familiar with legal language, the stuffy, often impenetrable stuff we get with, for example, solicitor letters or tenancy agreements.

And we all have some understanding of what passes for communication in a court of law. Plenty of Latin terms, much windy, provocative rhetoric, and a lot of exchanges that go straight over the heads of those not wearing powdered wigs.

All of which is why Mr Justice Peter Jackson gets this year's Osborne Memorial Award. Mr Jackson, presiding over a very difficult domestic abuse case, outlined the key points with a 17-page plain English summary.

Mr Jackson's summary lays out clearly why the children involved will now only have limited contact with their father.

Inside our 2016 awards issue

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Contact Plain English Campaign on 01663 744409 or at plainenglish.co.uk

More beauty product nonsense

Have you ever bought a skin-care product despite hearing some impressive-sounding gobbledegook? The beauty product industry has seemingly always used hefty doses of waffle when marketing its creams, oils and 'exfoliating' gels.

But how many of the claims made about said products bear scrutiny? Unsurprisingly, very few.

This issue rears its wrinkled, badly-moisturised head every so often. This time, it's due to supporters asking us about the use of the word 'redensified' in a current skin-moisturising product marketing campaign. What, they asked us, does it mean, if anything?

Well, the word doesn't appear to be in any dictionary, online or otherwise. The first use of it we can find relates to Indian city planning in the 1970s. By the early 2000s, the cosmetics industry decided, for whatever reason, they liked the sound of it.

One ad campaign featured a badly-advised Diane Keaton urging anyone interested in 'redensifying' their skin to hand over their money.



But there's no such word, and no such product feature. The claims made on behalf of 'redensifying' are often ridiculous.

As with other similar nonsensical claims, it's dishonest. Just as you can't 'replenish and repair damaged hair' (hair is dead – you can

make it shine but you can't repair it), you can't 'redensify' your skin, or anything else. Nor need you spend too much money 'exfoliating' it (getting rid of the dead top-layer of skin) – a quick scrub with a rough sponge will do the job.

If you're really keen on 'redensifying', you might want to put money you were about to spend on falsely-marketed creams back in your wallet.

For a bit of fun, here are a couple of recent beauty product descriptions. Of course, it's a competitive market, and the desperation to be different and more appealing is understandable. But the vast majority of the text in both adverts is nonsense, overwritten, irrelevant or all three.

Enjoy.

Anti aging duo kit transform skins texture through replenishment and exfoliation while correcting lost volume for remodeled skin contours. Skinceuticals A.G.E. Interrupter is specifically formulated to add volume to skins framework to improve the creping, thinning appearance of mature skin caused by intrinsic aging processes such as glycation.

Skinceuticals retexturing activator 0.5 ounce is a revolutionary resurfacing and replenishing serum that harnesses two polar mechanisms exfoliation and hydration to activate skins regeneration response, visibly diminishing surface lines and transforming skins fabric into a smoother, softer, more radiant complexion.

Redensifying care - B39

Nourishing and soothing, Redensifying care:

- **Restructures the dermal matrix**
- **Enhances its natural renewal**
- **Stimulates cell metabolism and the production of collagen and hyaluronic acid**
- **Moisturises and nourishes for long-lasting comfort**
- **Protects against the harmful effects of the free radicals responsible for ageing**

Life insurance woe

Do you have a life insurance policy? Do you understand it? Do you know which illnesses you're covered against? Is it the policy you need?

James Daley, writing in *The Telegraph*, suggests that, for many reasons, your life insurance policy might not be much use.



It could be written poorly, leaving you confused about what you or your loved ones are entitled to in the worst case scenario. It might not cover you in the way you think it does. And it might be a waste of time and money.

Particularly if you've bought the wrong policy, or assumed your policy provides cover for things it doesn't.

"If you ask me," writes Daley, "the insurance industry needs to take much of the blame. Protection policies are often mind-bogglingly complicated and are designed with disappointment built in for a small but significant group of customers. They can be expensive, too – and there are far too many bad-news stories of claims that went unpaid, leaving customers distraught."

Daley goes on to point out that an income-protection policy might be a much better bet for customers. So, rather than face the disappointment of discovering their illness doesn't provide them with a payout, however debilitating it might be, they get paid when they can't work. If a doctor signs them off, they get the money they need, regardless of small print.

"As with all insurance policies, there are limits to what's included. But these boundaries can often feel arbitrary," suggests Daley, and we agree. Who's to say how serious an illness is or isn't, and whether or not someone suffering from an illness deserves a payout? Everyone's different, with different illnesses affecting everyone in a unique way, and yet insurance companies think they can quantify what's worthy of compensation and what isn't – all for a hefty fee.

So instead of small print hiding away a nasty surprise when someone is struck down by illness, how about making Daley's suggestion a reality? No more cruel estimates about how someone may or may not feel – income protection for those unlucky enough to be afflicted by a terrible illness. That way, rather than a lump sum (if you're lucky enough to be deemed worthy of a payment) that may run out long before an ill person recovers, the ill person in question gets what they need for as long as they need it.

Of course, this won't suit the insurance companies, but we'd like to see one or two set a fair precedent. This would avoid scenarios like the one mentioned by Daley in his excellent article, where a heart-attack victim was considered ineligible for a payout due to their 'Troponin T enzyme level' being too low. Isn't a heart attack bad enough? Clearly not for some. How many customers would expect that kind of verdict after such a terrible and potentially fatal health scare?

As Daley points out, 99% of those paying for illness cover won't be absolutely sure what they're covered for. How about making sure 100% know clearly, by paying them while they recuperate?

The year in plain English

Welcome to this year's Plain English Campaign awards.

We've got our usual round-up of rogues abusing the English language. But as ever we're delighted to counter those with 2016's plain English heroes.

Well done to the likes of Bank of Ireland, Chatham House, Mr Justice Peter Jackson and SSE. And thank you to Boris Johnson for making the Foot in Mouth award such an easy pick.

This year, Bank of Ireland have done more to communicate

with their customers in plain English than any other bank and deserve recognition. Mr Jackson's plain English court summary was a great improvisation of a very emotive and difficult court case, and we were delighted to give him an award for his excellent work.

Boris Johnson's second Foot in Mouth award was inevitable, despite fierce competition from last year's gaffe-happy winner and new US President Donald Trump. Boris also saw off Sarah Palin, Jackie Walker and David Hoare. In any other year Trump's endless stream of

waffle, Palin's 'squirmishes' or Hoare's comments about the Isle of Wight that got him the sack might easily have won. But Boris's pledge to make Brexit a 'Titanic success' was unsinkable.

We also gave Tony Blair a long overdue Kick in the Pants, unlike Sir John Chilcot, who was somewhat more restrained. Chilcot's verdict confirmed that Blair's 'certainty' about Iraq's capabilities was 'not justified' but didn't really put the boot in. We were delighted to oblige.

Have a great Christmas and New Year – see you in 2017.

Plain English Awards

SeeSaw

Grief support for children and young people in Oxfordshire

Pancreatic Cancer UK

Diet and pancreatic cancer/An overview of diagnosis and treatment

NHS Health Scotland

A smear test could save your life

Judge Richard Posner

"Everything judges do can be explained in straightforward language—and should be."

UK National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)

Making plain English summaries a requirement when applying for NIHR funding

Five Rivers

Foster with us

Alex Hern

Guardian article 'I read all the small print on the internet and it made me want to die'

Chrissie Maher Award

Bank of Ireland

International Award

Carlo Rovelli

Web Awards

NSPCC

www.nspcc.org.uk

Independent Age

www.independentage.org

Chatham House

www.chathamhouse.org

Plain English Communicator Award

James Westhead

(Teach First)
Schoolchildren interpreting corporate jargon videos

Plain English Diplomas

Ruth Morton

Essex County council

Gillian Kimmet

The Care Inspectorate

Plain English Media Awards

Steve Lipin, Adam

Rosman

(New York Times)

Micha Solomon

(Forbes)

James Daley

(Daily Telegraph)

Jason Zweig

(Wall Street Journal)

Osborne Memorial Award

Mr Justice Peter Jackson

Plain English Award winners 2016

Foot in Mouth Award



Boris Johnson

Boris, one of the chief Brexit architects, was swiftly appointed Foreign Secretary by new Prime Minister Theresa May, presumably to teach him a lesson. He perhaps unwittingly revealed his true feelings about leaving the EU with the following.

"Brexit means Brexit and we're going to make a Titanic success of it."

Foot in Mouth Runners-up

Sarah Palin

Just to point out: we have no political affiliations when it comes down to selecting the winners and runners-up for our awards. But diehard right-wing Republicans Donald Trump and Sarah Palin were simply too good to ignore. Palin could easily have won outright for her advocacy of her party's Presidential candidate, which included the following. We know what you mean, Sarah...

"And you quit footin' the bill for these nations who are oil-rich, we're paying for some of their squirmishes that have been going on for centuries."

Foot in Mouth Runners-up (continued)

Donald Trump

Trump was a divisive figure. He offered what many believed was a refreshing 'plain-speaking' approach to politics. Others were more alarmed by him saying things like his following comment about Vladimir Putin, which proved that he doesn't really follow global news, a bit worrying coming from the President-elect.

"He's not going into Ukraine, OK, just so you understand. He's not going to go into Ukraine, all right? You can mark it down. You can put it down. You can take it anywhere you want."

Jackie Walker

Sometimes it really is better to say nothing at all on a subject, but try suggesting that to a politician...

"In terms of Holocaust day wouldn't it be wonderful if Holocaust day was open to all people who experienced Holocaust."

David Hoare

Hoare was sacked shortly after saying this about the Isle of Wight. Coincidence?

"They think of it as holiday land. But it is shocking. It's a ghetto; there has been inbreeding."

Pat on Back Award

SSE – energy bill template

Earlier this year, SSE tried to help ease customer confusion on energy bills by redesigning its template. The new design was a result of a year-long research project with help from consumers, Citizens Advice and the Design Council.

The design clearly splits the key relevant information into three bubbles which show an amount for electricity, gas and also a total. The bills also show how customers can pay less, what tariff they're using and comparison boxes showing how much gas and electricity they've used.

Kick in the Pants Award



Tony Blair

Sir John Chilcot verdict - '...in March 2003 there was no imminent threat from Saddam Hussein.' 'The judgements about Iraq's capabilities in that [September 2002] statement, and in the dossier published the same day, were presented with a certainty that was not justified.'

Department for Education (persecuting apostrophes)

Golden Bull Winners 2016

Colin Bibby sent us the following job advertisement for a British Council Project Manager. Good luck preparing for this one...

Project Manager: Regional English Language

Project Manager is responsible for the successful implementation of a 30-week project in two regions of Peru. The project aims to establish a replicable model for English policy implementation at regional level. This directly impacts regional leaders and influencers who need to strengthen their English language skills in order to empower themselves to build commitment and action plans that allow them to implement the policy successfully. The project also aims to collate key baseline information that allows the UK education sector to engage effectively with regional leaders, influencers and stakeholders to offer continuous partnership and support for bilingualism targets.

HM Revenue & Customs included this perplexing passage in their UK/FRANCE DOUBLE TAXATION CONVENTION.

2. As regards the application of this Convention at any time by a Contracting State, any term not defined therein shall, unless the context otherwise requires, have the meaning that it has at that time under the law of that State for the purposes of the taxes to which this Convention applies, any meaning under the applicable tax laws of that State prevailing over a meaning given to the term under other laws of that State.

Rob Wallis sent this in, from Ofqual's 'Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) supplementary Notice to Centres – Post-Results Services and Appeals', whatever that might be.

Ofqual has defined a marking error as:

'The awarding of a mark or the arrival at an outcome of Moderation which could not reasonably have been given or arrived at given the evidence generated by the Learner(s) (and for Moderation, the centre's marking of that evidence), the criteria against which Learners' performance is differentiated and any procedures of the awarding organisation in relation to Moderation or marking, including in particular where the awarding of a mark or outcome of moderation is based on: an Administrative Error, a failure to apply such criteria and procedures to the evidence generated by the Learner(s) where that failure did not involve the exercise of academic judgment, or an unreasonable exercise of academic judgment'.

Dr Steven Davies received the following nonsense from the 'Melt Team' at 'Mobile Doctors Limited'. May help with insomnia.

Dear Dr Davies

I write to you in respect of the current operation of the Episource Medical (Corex) system.

Based on advice recently received, the Episource system has historically been operated in a manner that indicates we should update the records we hold on your supplier account. The Episource system has been designed to facilitate the flow of information between our two businesses, including the management of your cost invoice to us. As a result, we require a self-billing agreement to be in place between our organisations, to be compliant with the VAT self-billing rules. For the avoidance of doubt, there is no issue with the amount of VAT we have recovered on supplies to us from you, and you do not need to re-issue your invoices to us. The issue is one of procedure. This we now seek to verify by reference to the completion of the attached agreement, which should be completed and returned to us either by email or by post. Please ensure that you retain a copy.

Mark Carroll was appalled enough at the following from Walmart that he decided we had to see it.

Our strategy to turn things around is focused on improving the retail basics. We are simplifying and strengthening our offering through improved availability and assortment discipline, reducing costs and driving sales through strategic price investments.

The following was Stockport NHS Foundation Trust's reply to Carolyn Minkes's question: Why has the proposal to appoint a second nurse been refused? It's not very helpful.

We are proud of the Parkinson's service we provide here at Stockport Foundation Trust. In an effort to continue to provide the highest quality service we have identified the Parkinson's service as key to the Stockport Together "Proactive" programme delivered as a Vanguard model of care. This will mean a slight change of service alignment within the Foundation Trust by moving it from the traditional Medicine Business Group to a more Community based setting. This change will have no negative impact on the quality of the service being delivered and will only help us to fully understand the demands on the service when delivered in this way and work with Commissioners to determine if our current resources are sufficient.



From Rob Slade, who read the following in 'SafetyNet'. It's about...something. Or maybe not.

As we issue this edition of SafetyNet, we find ourselves in a vibrant, yet uncertain climate in light of talk of a Brexit from the EU and with no crystal ball to predict how this would impact on the construction industry or individual businesses. On the other-hand, our clients are continuing to report a buoyant construction market, albeit one that brings different risks - increased workloads bringing a need to increase and develop resources to meet the increasing number of deadlines imposed. With that particular issue in mind, we will be gathering industry leaders from the construction, property and financial sectors to discuss a whitepaper that we have produced in conjunction with BLM on the impact of Macro-Economic trends within the construction industry, and which will be made available to Griffiths & Armour clients, via download in the next issue of SafetyNet.

Susan Kemp wasn't impressed with the following excerpt from a United Nations Development Programme job description. Nor were we.

The ART – Hub for Territorial Partnerships is a UNDP's global project that is geared at harnessing the potential of territorial partnerships through a variety of modalities, such as Decentralized Cooperation, South-South and triangular cooperation. ART is therefore an entry point for all international cooperation actors interested in harmonizing their respective actions in support of national and sub-national policies for sustainable and local human development. According to its new Project Document 2015-2017 and in support of UNDP's overall Framework on Local Governance and Local Development (LGLD), ART aims at strengthening and expanding the existing alliance between UNDP and Decentralized Cooperation partners in support of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at local level. ART also seeks to strengthen the potential and role of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) as development partners and to promote the principles of development cooperation effectiveness.

Scottish Widows sent Alistair Gammell a letter about his pension and his 'lifestyle switching strategy', whatever one of those is.

When you changed your retirement date, did you intend to align your lifestyle switching strategy to your revised retirement date?

Tom Skelton doesn't understand the following, sent to him by Weetabix/Procur4, and neither do we.

Recently you will have received an email from Catherine Lund (Strategic Sourcing Manager), regarding Weetabix's 2016 Procurement Review, which is aligned to delivering the Weetabix **Focus for Growth** Strategy. As part of the Procure4 team, I am supporting Weetabix with the FM Review which Catherine alluded to, to determine how Weetabix can move towards a more efficient and cost effective approach to Facilities Management (FM) and associated Engineering services.

Currently, Weetabix has more than 150 suppliers providing a wide range of FM and Engineering services to its sites. These relationships vary from long, strategic partnerships to transactional, one-off purchases. Weetabix wants to fully understand the services it is receiving from its suppliers and also to find out more about the capability within its supply chain.

Over the last few years, there have been many changes within the FM market and new model approaches have been established; for example, bundled services, tiered supply chains and Total Facilities Management (TFM). Weetabix is looking to determine its own fit-for-purpose model that incorporates its requirements, and explore how suppliers in the market can support in this objective.

As such, you are invited to participate in a Request for Information (RFI) to enable Weetabix to collate data from its supplier base and to understand the capabilities of its incumbents as well as other market players. The RFI includes questions regarding Weetabix's standard requirements for existing and new suppliers, as well as questions regarding the services you provide. This information will support decisions on next steps in this review.

The RFI will be issued on Weetabix's online e-sourcing system, Wee-Buy. This is the procurement module of the Wee-Buy system used for tender activity, not the P2P module, which as you will be aware will be moving to AX. You will receive log-on details to access the documentation in order to provide a response.

There are more Golden Bull winners on our website: www.plainenglish.co.uk

Councils ignore guidelines

You may recall recent Government guidelines that made plain English 'mandatory for all of Gov.UK'. Well, it seems that 'mandatory' means different things to different councils.

A new report recently looked closely at up to 100 pages on 191 local authority websites. The findings suggest that 82% of the information checked is 'confusing readers by failing to use plain English'.

Only 2 of the 191 websites checked had no more than 5% of sentences with more than 25 words, a key part of the guidelines.

The five easiest-to-read websites were: South Tyneside, Eastbourne Borough, London Borough of Hackney, Durham and Huntingdonshire.

The rogues' gallery included Sevenoaks, Worcester, Chiltern, the Isles of Scilly and Malvern Hills. The latter offender apparently has a website on which 31% of the sentences are more than 25 words long.

The immediate question is: why are those failing councils ignoring Government demands? It's not as though the guidelines were there to be looked at and either followed or not. They were instructions, not ideas.

We know better than anyone how much councils tend to indulge bad habits. For decades we've mocked the worst of council gobbledegook and jargon, and we've never run short of examples. But we assumed that the Government demands might improve standards.

Well, they don't seem to have made much difference. And it remains to be seen what, if anything, the Government will do about it. Will they punish those continuing to ignore their 'mandatory' measures?

Perhaps those at the very bottom of the performance list need our help? Perhaps they don't have the staff that can write clear and comprehensive information? They know where to find us – and just in case they don't we'll be contacting them to offer our services. We'll let you know how we – and they – get on.

Training dates for 2017 (open courses)

The Thistle Euston Hotel - London

Wednesday 25 January – plain English
Thursday 26 January – Report writing
Wednesday 15 March – 'Grammarcheck'
Thursday 16 March – plain English
Wednesday 24 May – plain English
Thursday 22 June – Writing for websites
Thursday 25 July – plain English
Wednesday 20 September – 'Grammarcheck'
Thursday 21 September – plain English
Tuesday 26 September – Report writing
Tuesday 24 October – Advanced grammar
Wednesday 22 November – plain English

The Malmaison Hotel - Manchester

Thursday 23 February – plain English
Wednesday 19 April – 'Grammarcheck'
Thursday 20 April – plain English
Wednesday 21 June – plain English
Tuesday 22 August – plain English
Wednesday 13 September – diploma course
Thursday 14 September – diploma course
Wednesday 18 October – 'Grammarcheck'
Thursday 19 October – plain English
Wednesday 13 December – plain English

If you have any questions about our courses, phone us on 01663 744409

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