

Plain English

The voice of Plain English Campaign

Awards 2006 Issue 66

Campbell triumph

Supermodel wins Foot in Mouth as BBC lands Media award hat-trick

Naomi Campbell (pictured right), the British supermodel, has won Plain English Campaign's 'coveted' Foot in Mouth award for 2006, for a comment she made in June.

"I love England, especially the food. There's nothing I like more than a lovely bowl of pasta."

She joins a list of other celebrities and politicians who have won the award, including Richard Gere, Tracy Emin and Boris Johnson.

Meanwhile, the BBC have won three out of six 'good' awards in the plain English Media category. Radio 2 presenter, Jeremy Vine, won Best National Radio Programme, while BBC1 show 'This Week' took the Best National Television Programme. The BBC Wales watchdog programme, X-Ray, won in the regional television category.

The awards take place on Tuesday 12 December at the Brewery in London, and will be presented by broadcast journalist Mary Nightingale. This year the Osborne award will be given to Labour MP



Model Naomi Campbell

Harriet Harman, largely due to her introduction of a parliamentary bill 'translation' for the first time (see page 6).

Six organisations have won Plain English Awards, which are given to the clearest documents of the year, and six government departments have won Inside Write Awards, which recognise clarity in document written by civil servants, for civil servants.

This year we had a record number of nominations from the public for the Web Award, which is given to the clearest website. The standard of entries was very high, but after some deliberation, HM Prison Service have emerged victorious.

Wading through the Bull

As usual, entries for the Golden Bull awards, 'booby prizes' given to the year's worst examples of gobbledygook, flooded in throughout the year. There are seven winners for 2006, including broadcaster, writer and academic Germaine Greer, Bury County Court, and the Insititute for Fiscal Studies. Recruitment company Wheale, Thomas, Hodgins plc have again won a Golden Bull for a job advertisement, having previously won one in 2001. Needless to say, most of the Bull winners are not exactly grateful for the honour.

You can find a full list of all this year's winners, details of the winning documents, and Golden Bull extracts on the centre pages of this magazine.

Plain English Campaign - fighting for crystal-clear communication since 1979

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Chrissie: my Liverpool pride

We hear more and more about Liverpool, the European City of Culture in 2008. Some people laughed at the thought, but Liverpool is my home town and I'm proud of any recognition that Liverpool gets.

I have already been in touch with the people responsible for developing the website, Liverpool in Print, to coincide with the City of Culture year. To me, culture is as much about how grassroots people have contributed to the ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular

community as it is about the work of writers or musicians.

Liverpool was the inspiration for Plain English Campaign. Back in the 60s and 70s, a bunch of us produced some of the first community papers in Britain, including the Liverpool News and the Tuebrook Bugle.

We did this because the regular papers and radio stations were not concerned about the lives of ordinary people, people like me who left school barely able to read.

Ordinary people got a raw deal. Half the time, they couldn't understand what was going on. The language used on everything from their rent books to the instructions on a bottle of medicine was difficult to understand. Well, over the years, Plain English Campaign has changed most of that.

The people of Liverpool have a good story to tell. They have contributed to the world accepting plain English. And if that isn't culture, I don't know what is!

How are your 'sub investment grade debts'?

Words in the English language are forever changing. Buzz phrases come and go. So do some ridiculous - but occasionally useful - words recorded on Collins Word Web.

It contains over 520 million words and is said to be growing rapidly each month.

Some ridiculous examples are shown below.

- Celebutard - a spiteful way to describe people such as Paris Hilton.

- Moobs - a merger of man and boobs, to describe an overweight man.
- Lamestreamers - people who haven't yet taken to blogging.
- Sadfab - a cruel acronym for 'single and desperate for a baby'.

The Financial Times recently compared terms that financial people use today with terms used 10 years ago when dealing with failing companies. A conference on 'distressed debt' is now called a 'special situations event'.

Delegates there discuss 'stretched structures' (companies drowning in debt).

Failing firms are now called 'stressed' not distressed. Junk bonds are called 'sub investment grade debt'.

In another part of the Financial Times, columnist Tyler Brule notes the advance of the American phrase 'reaching out' to people, where once 'called' or 'contacted' was enough. The phrase can dominate business conversations.

How gobbledygook crosses the Channel

French drinks giant Pernod Ricard is now one of the world's largest corporations, following its takeover of UK company Allied Lyons.

Their annual report and accounts shows once again that gobbledygook can cross the Channel.

Here are three examples.

'The premiumisation of the market has been confirmed in both developed and emerging markets.'

'Sustainable development consists of reconciling economic efficiency, social equity and the preservation of the natural

environment in a framework of continuous improvement.'

'This original experience, unique in its genre, illustrates at the same time the conviviality, sharing of cultures and respect of others.' (A comment on a work of art produced to show the group's business and values.)

Plain language in Europe

Plain-language supporters, keen to set up their own plain-language campaigns throughout Europe, have just held their autumn conference in Amsterdam.

Plain English Campaign representatives John Wild and George Maher attended the conference, along with delegates from Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and The Netherlands.

This latest conference followed meetings in Stockholm and at our headquarters in New Mills, near Manchester.

The meetings were part of a programme called the Grundtvig Learning Partnership which is funded by the European Commission.

Karine Nicolay, from Belgium explained: 'We learnt about Plain English Campaign's years of experience. Rather than start from scratch, we asked them to teach us all the do's and don'ts.'

The aims of the partnership include:

- setting up plain-language groups in European countries;
- expanding national centres that already exist to provide understandable information for people from ethnic minorities, people with a lack of education, and those with learning difficulties; and
- creating a website that will provide accessible information to its target audience as well as providing writing, design, and testing guidelines for information providers.



Members of the partnership in Amsterdam.

Chrissie Maher said: 'It's great to see that the same enthusiasm that got our campaign going exists in other countries. We will do all we can to help.'



These are some of the faces of Plain English Campaign. Meet a group from the editing department based at our headquarters in the Peak District. They deal directly with clients as their documents are converted into plain English.

The staff provide editing, proofreading, quality-control and tracking services.

Meet some of our editors

Katherine Ardern, head of editing for the last eight years, said: 'There is a good atmosphere in the department.'

Everyone works as a team, depending on each other and sharing knowledge. This helps to keep our editing consistent.'

Left to right in the picture: Jennifer Taylor, Christine Pridding, Laura Pettitt, Maureen Hammond, Clare Haynes, Laura Ripper, Katherine Ardern, Marc Gardner and Janet Millner.

Plain English Camp

Plain English Award winners

The year's clearest documents

- The Essential Business Guide Ltd for 'The Essential Business Guide'
- World Cancer Research Fund for 'Breast awareness' card
- Helena Housing for 'Resident's Handbook'
- The Department for Social Development for 'Directory of services for older people'
- ASDA for a product recall notice
- National Osteoporosis Society for the 'Living with osteoporosis' guide



Inside Write Award winners

The year's clearest internal government documents

- Ministry of Defence for 'Navy News'
- UK Trade & Investment for 'Our World' magazine
- Welsh Assembly Government for 'Rules for Tables'
- HM Revenue & Customs for 'Chatterbox' magazine
- UK Visas for 'Managing e-mail'
- Department for Work and Pensions for 'The DWP journey' leaflet

Golden Bul

Eastleigh Borough Council Building Act 1984

'Hereby in accordance with Section 32 declares that the accordingly the said Act and respects the proposed work deposited.'

Media Award winners

The year's clearest reporting

- Best National Newspaper: The Guardian
- Best Regional Newspaper: Newcastle Evening Chronicle
- Best National Television programme: This Week (BBC1)
- Best Regional Television programme: X-Ray (BBC Wales)
- Best National Radio programme: The Jeremy Vine Show (BBC Radio 2)
- Best Regional Radio station: Pirate FM (Cornwall)

Fife Council - for a letter a change to bin-collection o

'It has been brought to our a due to changes made to yo household wastes bin colle within your new calendar. Yo emptied week beginning the 2006, then next collection w until the week beginning the 2006. Thus having to wait 3 collection. Therefore we are normal collection on your no day, week starting the 3rd A on your new collection date the 10th April then there aft weeks.'

Web Award winner

The year's clearest website

- HM Prison Service for www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk

The Institute for fiscal stu

'While the literature on nono the availability of an auxiliar observations, this paper est enables the identification of variables models with contin

Foot in Mouth Award

The most baffling comment of the year

- Miss Naomi Campbell

Campaign Awards 2006



Award winners - for the year's gobbledygook!

il - for a notice given under the

the provision of the Building Act 1984, the said plans shall be of no effect and the said Building Regulations shall as have effect as if no plan had been

Crafts Council of Ireland - for a circular letter

'The re-writing of the vocabulary of intemporal Irish heritage is a possible vector for submissions on the condition that this transposition is resolutely anchored in the 21st century through a contemporary lens that absolutely avoids drifting into the vernacular.'

about a dates

attention that our grey collection dates our bin will be the 20th March would not be the 10th April weeks for to provide a normal collection April and again, week starting er every 2

Bury County Court - for 'General Form of Judgment or Order'

'IT IS ORDERED THAT THE CLAIM BE ADJOURNED GENERALLY WITH PERMISSION TO THE CLAIMANT TO RESTORE TO THE LIST WITHOUT FORMAL APPLICATION NOT LATER THAN 16:00 HOURS ON THE 12TH SEPTEMBER 2006 WHEREUPON THE CLAIM DO STAND STRUCK OUT IF NOT SO RESTORED.'

Wheale, Thomas, Hodgkins plc - for a job advertisement

'Our client is a pan-European start-up leveraging current cutting edge I.P. (already specified) with an outstanding product/value solutions set. It is literally the right product, in the right place at the right time... by linking high-value disparate legacy systems to achieve connectivity between strategic partners/acquisition targets and/or disparate corporate divisions. The opportunity exists to be the same (i.e. right person etc. etc) in a growth-opportunity funded by private equity capital that hits the 'sweet-spot' in major cost driven European markets.'

udies - for a website document description

classical measurement error traditionally relies on y dataset containing correctly measured establishes that the availability of instruments a large class of nonclassical nonlinear errors-in- continuously distributed variables.'

Writer and broadcaster Germaine Greer - for a column in the Guardian

'The first attribute of the art object is that it creates a discontinuity between itself and the unsynthesised manifold.'

‘The law belongs to us all, not just the lawyers’

The Government’s bold decision to introduce notes in plain English alongside a parliamentary bill has been warmly welcomed by Chrissie Maher, founder director of Plain English Campaign. But we have gone a step further by translating a full section of the actual bill into plain English so anyone could understand it. That includes the MPs who will have to vote on the bill to make it law!



Harriet Harman, who hopes to attend our annual awards in December.

When she first heard that civil servants working on the draft Coroners Reform Bill had put a plain English translation opposite each page of legalese, Chrissie hailed it as a landmark. ‘This must be the way that all bills are written in the future,’ said Chrissie. Then she sent this message to Harriet Harman, Minister of State at the Department of Constitutional Affairs. ‘Congratulations! The law in plain English – my dream come true.’

Ms Harman was pleased with the explanation of her draft bill. In an interview with *The Times* she said: ‘Many ministers, let alone MPs, find bills in the current form hard going, so I don’t know how on earth the public is expected to understand them. This will help the public join in the debate. I haven’t spoken to a single minister about this without them saying they want their bills in this form.’

Our version has now gone to Ms Harman’s office for her to consider.

Chrissie added: ‘When ministers themselves say they also want their own bills in plain English, our case is overwhelming. The public don’t usually have to look at legal bills. But if they do, it’s essential that they can understand things. The law belongs to us all, not just the lawyers.’

Chrissie looks upon this landmark as justification for all the years of campaigning, often against governments and big business. She said: ‘We funded research in South Africa, which helped Nelson Mandela and the new South Africa. That and our continuing links in South Africa have, I believe, helped democracy flourish there, despite all the problems. Now it’s our turn. The Government should be bold and say that all new bills should be in plain English.’

We have translated part of the draft Coroners Bill into plain English. This is a response to civil servants’ attempts to put a plain-language version alongside clauses in traditional legalese in the draft Bill.

We have already hailed the move by Harriet Harman’s department but taken it a step further by using the plainest of English in our suggested version.

We like our translation of part of the draft bill and await Ms Harman’s views on our efforts. While wrestling with the draft wording of the new bill, we opened

He, she or they?

up a debate. When referring to a person whose sex is not specified, should we use the clumsy phrase ‘he or she’ or should we say, as we mostly do, ‘they’? This is now generally accepted and is what ordinary people understand.

But we had to use the legal wording to refer to men and women. We would have liked to refer to all people as ‘they’ but this

would not have been precise enough in a legal document. The Interpretation Act 1978 states that masculine words include feminine words. In the glossary, which now appears in our version of the bill, we say that ‘... in the context of the Act, he includes she and his includes hers’.

In a section referring to the duties of coroners – who, of course, can be men or women – our version uses he and his. This is as much in the interests of clarity as anything else.

We will let you know of any further developments.



What our clients think

Leicestershire County Council is a major local authority serving nearly 600,000 people. It used our services to put together a special project on 'Highways transportation and development' (Htd). In the first of a series of articles, we find out why our clients value our help.

Andy Yeomanson, senior engineer highways development control, says: 'Htd gives guidance on how to design new developments to meet the needs of those who walk, cycle, use buses or drive.

'It contains advice on the design of roads, cycleways, footways and car-parking areas. This can be applied to developments from a small cul-de-sac to a housing estate, or from a factory to an industrial estate. It is a technical document, used mainly by engineers, architects and other professionals.

Project team, left to right: Louise Kirkpatrick, Paul Sheard, Younus Seedat, Andy Yeomanson, Frank Bedford, Stuart Pritchard, Nicki Cozens and Kingsley Cook.

'But others, including the public, must be able to understand it, too. Achieving the right approach was a challenge. Putting Htd together was a real team effort. It involved many colleagues in our Highways Development Control Group and from other parts of the authority.

'We sought the public's views and looked at other guides and data. After that it took about a year to write, working closely with Plain English Campaign to prepare the final text for our website'.

'The campaign's editing was very helpful, turning a document written by several authors into one

that flows with a consistent style.

'Htd is helping us create developments that bring a high-quality, attractive and safe environment for road users. We are pleased with the document. Plain English Campaign played a key part and we continue to work with them as we review and update the document. We are proud that it carries the Crystal Mark.'

What others think about the document

Htd has been praised by other councils, developers and private consultant firms. Comments include the following.

'I like the language and ethos of Htd very much.'

'It is the sort of document I would aspire to produce ... and will commend Htd whenever the opportunity arises.'

Politically-correct words and downsizing the children

Madam, I shrank the kids! Is that what the film would be called in a politically correct world? What about, **Madam I downsized the children!**

Farcical, isn't it? But that's what the famous movie **Honey I shrank the kids!** would be called if those politically correct busybodies succeed in banning

slang terms such as 'pet', 'love' or 'honey'. As long as slang is not used to offend people it has its place in our day-to-day lives and can add 'music' to our language.

Awards presenter - Mary Nightingale

Mary Nightingale presents ITV1's Evening News, and has twice been named Newscaster of the Year by TRIC (Television and Radio Industries Club). Mary joined ITV's newscasting team in 2001 and won the accolade the next year, and again in 2004. In April of this year, Mary presented ITV1's 'The girl who would be queen' - an intimate portrait of the Queen on her 80th birthday where Mary was given exclusive access to the Royal Family's home-movie collection. She is currently filming 'Holiday Undercover' for ITV.

Prior to this Mary hosted many series of 'Wish you were here' for ITV1 and has hosted her own interview-based radio series, 'Dreaming Aloud', for Classic FM. She started her journalism career as a presenter and writer on World

Business Satellite for TV Tokyo - a live daily business bulletin. She then joined BBC World Service Television's World Business Report as a presenter and writer, covering economic and corporate news.

For five years, Mary has hosted the Tio Pepe Restaurant Awards. Most recently, she presented the 100 Best Companies Awards and the Personnel Today Awards. Mary has also hosted ceremonies for Pricewaterhouse Coopers and FT Business. She has chaired conferences and hosted panel debates for KPMG and Peugeot, and interviewed the Chief Executive Officer of HSBC and Abbey.

Prior to embarking on a career in broadcasting Mary was a



Mary Nightingale

Eurobond Dealer and Salesperson from 1986-1990, initially at the Bank of America International and then Tokai International, dealing with European Banks and Investment Fund.

Plain English diplomas 2006

Roger Winter - Cabinet Office (Civil Service Pensions)
Verona Hanlon, Pauline McKiernan - Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority
Jenny Harris - Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales
Stephen McKeown - Chester Zoo
Julie Jones, Ryan Pratt - Legal & General
Jo-Anne Langley - Sesame
Linda Robertson - Aberdeenshire Council
Gillian Kilburn - Rural Payments Agency
Louise Shaw - GMPTE
Andrew Perkins - Joint Services Command and Staff College
Shawna Eadie - Inland Revenue
Gill Smith, Rebecca Roas & Jane Byrne - Newcastle City Council
Elaine Howard - British Council
Eileen McKee - Glasgow Caledonian University

Harriet Harman wins Osborne award

As has been written about on other pages, one of the biggest strides for plain English this year has been the translation of the Coroner's Reform Bill. Harriet Harman MP was primarily responsible for the move, and although it remains to be seen whether all future legislation will be produced in this way, we felt that we should recognise her efforts in some way.

The Osborne award is given to people who have made a significant contribution to plain English or to the Campaign. We felt that Harriet Harman had in many ways overthrown years of tradition by suggesting the move.

Chrissie Maher OBE, founder of the campaign, said "Everyone, from the general public to senior ministers, needs to be able to understand the laws that affect them. We have been banging at

the doors of Parliament for decades, trying to convince ministers to make their legislation more accessible. I hope that this historic step marks the start of a renewed commitment to plain English and an end to indecipherable documents."

Back in June, while talking on 'Sunday AM' to another champion of plain English, Andrew Marr. Ms Harman said that the translation was important so that "members of the public who actually want to know what the effect of the Bill is going to be, can actually read it for themselves instead of just listening to the political debate."

We would like to congratulate Harriet Harman on the award, which she will be presented with at our awards ceremony. Hopefully her efforts will be mirrored by other politicians on all sides in the future.