

Department of Public Expenditure, the National Disability Authority and the Passport Service are the winners at the Plain English Awards

[1.30pm Monday 11 February] The winners of the Plain English Awards for Ireland, sponsored by Mason Hayes & Curran, were announced by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in Dublin today.

The winners in the ‘Best use of plain English by an organisation’ category, with a joint entry, were the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the National Disability Authority. Their winning entry is a [Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service](#). The document shows workers in the public service how to produce communications that can be easily understood by members of the public.

In the digital category, the Passport Service won first place for their online passport renewal website. This service can be used by Irish citizens living anywhere in the world and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

The full list of winning organisations are:

- **Organisation:** Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the National Disability Authority
Document: Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service - A Universal Design Approach (see document [here](#))
Category: Best use of plain English by an organisation
- **Organisation:** Passport Service
Entry: Online passport renewal website (see website [here](#))
Category: Plain English in the digital world
- **Organisation:** AIB
Document: The impact of rewriting three customer letters in plain English (see letters [here](#))
Category: Plain English – the impact
- **Person:** Clare O’Byrne
Entry: Financial letter (see letter [here](#))
Category: Public category - best letter rewritten in plain English
- **Champions of plain English**
A champion of plain English is someone who promotes the use of clear communication and plain language in their organisation. At this year’s awards, the following people were recognised as champions of plain English:
Liam Ronayne from Cork Library
Patricia Carey from the [Adoption Authority of Ireland](#)
Norma Deasy from the HSE
Mike Gogan from AIB
The **facilitators of the knowledge transfer and exchange workshop** at the All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care.

The aims of the Plain English Awards are to reward organisations that communicate clearly and to promote the use of plain English in all public information. Fifty organisations submitted over **70 entries** that used plain English standards. An independent panel of experts were involved in the judging process.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the National Disability Authority, and the Passport Service won the award for presenting their information clearly in plain English. **AIB** won the award because their series of rewritten letters highlights the benefits for organisations of communicating in plain English.

The Plain English Awards are organised by NALA and sponsored by leading law firm Mason Hayes & Curran. The Awards were presented at a lunch in the Law Society of Ireland, Dublin.

Speaking about the awards, Inez Bailey, CEO, NALA said: “We developed these awards as we want to create a public preference for organisations that choose to communicate in plain English. Everyone benefits from clear information, written in plain language. Citizens are more likely to understand their rights, organisations are more likely to save money and governments are more likely to make better use of their resources.

We would like to congratulate the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the National Disability Authority, the Passport Service and AIB. They have won this award for thinking of the people who use their services and putting them first.”

Commenting on the sponsorship, Declan Black, Managing Partner at Mason Hayes & Curran said: “We strongly support the use of plain English and are very pleased to sponsor these awards. Our job as lawyers often involves explaining complex information. We seek to do that clearly by using simple but accurate language. This approach applies particularly to the advice we give clients but also when we present a client’s position to another party or to a court. In our view, a good lawyer is always clear, accurate and, where possible, brief. We hope that our support of this award contributes to the use of plain language in everyday communications and we congratulate the winners on a job well done.”

About plain English

Plain English is a style of presenting information that helps you understand it the first time you read or see it. Plain English gives us information in a language we can understand and helps us to make informed choices. It is particularly important to provide information in plain language for people with literacy difficulties. Plain English can also save organisations time and money as clearer information is shown to reduce mistakes and complaints.

NALA’s Plain English Awards come at a time of increased focus on the importance of plain language. Fine Gael TD Noel Rock introduced a **Plain Language Bill** in the Dáil last week. Labour Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin also introduced a Plain Language Bill in the Seanad. Both parties have been working with NALA to develop the Plain Language Bill. The Plain Language Bill aims to ensure that all information for the public from Government and State bodies is written and presented in plain language.

Reasons for winning:

Organisation: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the National Disability Authority

Document: Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service - A Universal Design Approach

Category: Best use of plain English by an organisation

Reason for winning: This document was the winner in its category because it shows workers in the public service how to produce communications that can be easily understood by members of the public. It provides a set of very clear, easy-to-follow guidelines about how to improve written, verbal and digital communications. The document is based on a universal

design approach and includes useful examples of communications before and after plain English has been used.

Organisation: Passport Service

Entry: Online passport renewal website

Category: Plain English in the digital world

Reason for winning: This website was the winner in its category because it is accessible, easy to follow and uses plain English. People who use the website to renew a passport are told at the beginning of the process what they need to have ready in order to complete the application. The process is presented to users in a very clear, step by step fashion and it can be completed in less than five minutes.

Organisation: AIB

Document: The impact of rewriting three customer letters in plain English

Category: Plain English – the impact

Reason for winning: This entry was the winner in its category because it highlights the benefits for organisations of communicating in plain English. The entry consists of three letters to customers that AIB wrote in plain English. To measure impact, AIB tested the old version (before plain English was used) and the new version (after plain English was used) with 300 members of the public. Participants read both versions of each letter and told AIB which they prefer. The letters were presented randomly so there was no bias towards the new letters. In the case of each letter, the participants said that the new plain English versions were easier to understand and made the bank seem more approachable.

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The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a charity committed to making sure people with literacy difficulties can fully take part in society. According to the latest OECD international survey in 2012, one in six adults in Ireland has problems reading and writing. Plain English benefits all of us but is particularly helpful for Irish people with low literacy levels.

NALA research has found that almost 95% of Irish adults are in favour of plain English. About half of them (48%) find official documents, including information from the Government difficult to understand. They also find jargon, terms and conditions, and financial information challenging.