

Twenty-five years of battling gobbledygook

26 July 1979 – 26 July 2004



A quarter of a century ago, Martin Cutts conceived what seemed like one of the strangest crusades of modern times, the Plain English Campaign. Strange or not, the idea of plain language in written public information has gradually begun to take root in the public mind and in government and commercial life in many parts of the world.

This booklet looks back on Cutts's 25 years as a campaigner, editor, author and teacher in the plain-language field – first with the Plain English Campaign and now with Plain Language Commission – and considers what still needs to be done.

PLAIN
LANGUAGE
COMMISSION

Paulo Scritti describes how the seeds of a modern plain-language revolution were sown and looks at progress towards making plain language an accepted part of public policy

Great oaks from little acorns grew

Twenty-five years ago, Martin Cutts had a bright idea. While in his final year at university, he'd been joint editor of *The Liverpool News*, a paper for adults with reading difficulties, and went on to clarify several official forms for Liverpool City Council and the government's Supplementary Benefits Commission. Now, working as a journalist in Salford, near Manchester, he realized that over-complex public and legal information was adding to the misery of some of the poorest people, impeding their access to many benefits and services.

So Cutts decided to do something about it. He co-founded a ginger group for clear public information, the Plain English Campaign (PEC). Having loaded a transit van with empty boxes wrapped in red tape (geddit?), a portable paste table and a borrowed shredding machine, he and other conspirators sped to London to launch the campaign with a public shredding of official forms in Parliament Square on 26 July 1979, under the noses of those joint fountains of gobbledygook, the House of Commons and Whitehall. The stunt was covered by press, radio and TV from all over the world. What had seemed like a deranged frolic beneath the statue of that renowned plain wordsmith, Winston Churchill, suddenly looked like a national, if not international, cause waiting to be fought. People outraged by bewildering official forms, incoherent letters from public bodies, weird legal documents and useless product instructions sent copies to PEC. Cutts began writing letters of complaint on their behalf to the government agencies and firms responsible, agitating for change.

PEC struck a chord with the incoming Thatcher government too, which regarded clearer (and fewer) official forms as a way of reducing the state's burden on citizens and businesses. A white paper (policy statement) followed in 1982, requiring government departments to report annually on how many forms they had clarified, amalgamated or (preferably) abolished.

PEC gradually became a micro-business providing editing services and training courses, with Cutts and Christina Maher as the

two partners. Cutts bore much of the editing and training burden, but also wrote a regular magazine, *Plain English*, the *Plain English Training Course* (a widely sold learning package), and books of guidance and propaganda such as *Writing Plain English* (1980), *Small Print* (1983), *Gobbledygook* (1984), and *The Plain English Story* (1986), in each case with Maher as nominal co-author.

The National Consumer Council (NCC) and the Joseph Rowntree Social Service Trust provided occasional research grants to help the fledgling business survive. When Cutts suggested an annual awards competition for the best and worst official documents, the NCC reacted enthusiastically and was for several years its leading sponsor. The awards attracted publicity out of all proportion to PEC's size and, naturally, the juiciest examples of jargon tended to get the biggest headlines. In the first year, their perpetrators got a wastepaper basket for their troubles; in the second a parcel of tripe; and after that, more decorously, a golden bull trophy. These anti-prizes encouraged reform, while trophies for good writing showed PEC's intentions to be constructive.

Cutts's work helped inspire similar crusades in many other countries. Today there are strong plain-language movements in the US, Canada, Australia and Sweden, while the Plain Language Association International network co-ordinates a regular international conference of plain-language practitioners.

In 1983 John Walton, a council solicitor, and other UK lawyers began their own agitation for clear writing in the legal profession by launching 'Clarity – the international movement to simplify legal language'. Today, Clarity has 1,000 members in more than 20 countries, and publishes a regular journal, now in its 51st issue.

In 1988 Cutts quit the PEC partnership and soon after formed Words at Work, an editing and training firm that became Plain Language Commission in 1994. The business has prospered, with many government agencies, local authorities and leading

companies among its customers and corporate members. Plain Language Commission's Clear English Standard accreditation mark has been awarded to more than 10,000 documents, including some that have gone to millions of UK households. Cutts says: 'No accreditation mark can guarantee that a document is clear to every reader in every set of circumstances, but the fact that it has been through our detailed editing checks means it will be well understood by most.' Plain Language Commission offers a similar accreditation mark for websites. Cutts welcomes the setting up of an accreditation scheme for financial services documents, run by the Pensions Protection Investments Accreditation Board. This certifies many well-known brands, such as Prudential and Scottish Widows, as 'tested for clarity,

quality and service', and lets them use a Quality Mark saying so on their customer booklets.

Cutts's campaigning work has continued. Responding to a challenge from the UK government's law-writing office to improve the clarity of British law, he rewrote and redesigned a particularly gruesome example, the Timeshare Act. Published in his book *Lucid Law* (1994, 2000), the redrafted law showed that statutes did not need to be impenetrable. It reduced the average sentence length from 36 words to 24, reduced the total number of words by 1,000 (a cut of 25%), and replaced antiquated English such as 'offeror' and 'offeree' with 'seller' and 'buyer'.

Plain Language Commission tested the two versions with 90 senior law students. Nine out of ten preferred the plain version to the real thing. Performance also improved: on one key question, 94% got the correct answer when working with the rewritten version, while only 48% did so with the real act. In a foreword to the 2000 edition of *Lucid Law*, Michael Zander QC, emeritus professor of law at the London School of Economics, said: 'In the past decade the official attitude to the drafting of statutory materials in this country has been transformed. Martin Cutts says that the pressure for change has come from many people and organizations and that is so. But he has been the single most important source of that pressure...It is a remarkable achievement.'

The pretend law sent a jolt through UK statutory drafting. In 1995, after pressure from two groups of leading tax and accountancy professionals – one of whom asked Cutts to redraft a chunk of tax law as a model example – the government set up the Tax Law Rewrite project to convert 6,000 pages of turgid tax law into somewhat plainer English. The project continues, and swathes of redrafted law – as well as a more modern page layout – have been approved by parliament.

Cutts has also worked for change among the European Community's law-writers. Insiders at the European Commission (EC) helped him redraft into plainer English an EC directive on toy safety, published in his *Clarifying Eurolaw* (2001), then had translations made into all the Community languages to show every country what was possible. This work was followed by *Clarifying EC Regulations* in 2002 (co-written with Emma Wagner, then a head of department in the EC's translation service), which showed how the same plain-language treatment could clarify an EC regulation. Wagner led the successful Fight the Fog campaign in the EC, which still continues.

In the 1990s, Cutts toured India four times for the British Council, spreading the plain-language message among consumer groups,



Plain Language Commission's accreditation mark for paper-based documents



Plain Language Commission's website accreditation mark

business people and lawyers, and has helped rewrite some of the country's leading insurance policies.

Cutts's best-known book, *The Plain English Guide* (1996), continues to sell well, with a new edition, the *Oxford Guide to Plain English*, due out in 2004. The book provides 21 guidelines for writing plain language and explains how to apply them.

Many people worldwide have been involved in making plain language acceptable and, in some cases, giving it legal status. For example, in the 1990s there was successful pressure for a European directive requiring standard-form consumer contracts to be in 'plain, intelligible language'. This stemmed from work by consumer groups on the continent and, in the UK, the Consumers for the European Community Group (later, Consumers in Europe Group), the NCC, the Consumers' Association, and European Research into Consumer Affairs. The resulting regulations, now being enforced in the UK by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) and the Financial Services Authority, are removing screeds of legalistic gibberish from contracts that previously consumers had no choice but to accept.

The OFT publishes a regular bulletin showing the latest words and phrases it has slaughtered, with terms like 'right of appropriation', 'lien', 'reversion', 'mutatis mutandis' and 'successors in title' being struck down as meaningless to the person in the street. Bradford and Bingley plc withdrew a 59-clause agreement after its clarity was challenged. The OFT says: 'We have yet to see an example of obscure wording that could not be improved. Major suppliers of services have shown by example that contracts covering many complex issues can be clearly drafted.'

Cutts still reckons there's plenty to do: 'Sometimes I think plain-language practitioners are fighting the forces of darkness, but now there are a lot more soldiers on our side than in 1979. The main need is for every firm and public body to have a core group of skilful writers and editors who spread good practice and oversee the growth of high standards. We aim to support them through our accreditation of documents and websites, in-house courses, and the StyleWriter plain-English editing software.'



• The late Lord Denning, who presented awards for plain language in 1982, is pictured with Sara Mason (National Consumer Council) and Martin Cutts. Pungent as ever, Denning said: 'It is better to be clear and brief than to go drivelling on.'



• Students at the National Law School of India, Bangalore, during a two-day workshop in 1995 led by Plain Language Commission. Martin Cutts says lawyers are never too old to learn new tricks, but might as well be caught young.

New social disease: writing rage

Martin Cutts argues that businesses need good English – as well as plain English – if they are to communicate well with customers

It comes as no great surprise that an increasing number of student teachers, some with education degrees, are – according to UK government figures – failing the compulsory literacy test. Many people spend more than a decade in formal education and emerge without knowing where to put full stops, let alone the apostrophes that so worry sticklers.

The more swanky degrees people have, the worse their writing often is. I recently edited a dissertation for an arts undergraduate, a native English speaker with 15 years of British education behind him. Not only was there no discernible argument, but the punctuation was so crass that the text had very little meaning. He got a good pass and graduated soon after. He is going to teach (but not English). He could be minister of education one day.

No-one loves a pedant. But every one of us receives such an illiterate flood of junk post and email that writing rage could be the next social disease. It's not so much the unexplained jargon, though there is enough of that. It's the authors' unfamiliarity with basic sentence construction and punctuation. Anyone can make mistakes but this is beyond the normal blundering of two-fingered typists in a hurry. No wonder education ministers bang on about better spelling and grammar: some businesses could do with a literacy hour of their own.

For example, in Safeways, Macclesfield, this staff notice on the deli counter is clearly visible to customers:

'Under no circumstances do not put any cheese back on the counter without a date.'

Feeling doubly negative about that, I pick up a box of pastries with a preprinted label saying **Safeways – the baker's**. Perhaps

Success of plain-language form for US pensioners

In 1999 the Social Security Administration (SSA) began issuing an annual benefit statement to every working American over 25 years old, some 125 million people. Plain-language experts at the Center for Clear Communication, Inc had tested the previous six-page form and found it to be poorly structured and presented, with some important details buried. So they wrote, designed and pilot-tested four prototypes of a new form. These versions had a clear title, good organization and a design that reduced production and handling costs.

They were consumer-tested through a national mail survey of 16,000 people. After the best of them was issued, a Gallup survey in 2000 reported that '...the results to date are glowing. The new social security statements have played a significant role in increasing Americans' understanding of social security'.

it's better not to ask which bit of the baker was small enough to fit in the box.

There is little comfort in a restaurant menu in Birmingham, where the description of Trio de Pasta says:

'The chef will suprise you with a choice of 3 different pasta's on a large plate (minimum 2 person's and above).'

It's true that the American poet Emily Dickinson was clueless when it came to apostrophes, and the novelist Mary Wesley famously told her editor that she 'didn't do punctuation', but few businesses today can get away with verbal slop and still look capable. Take a security firm on Merseyside, whose brochure says:

'Extreme physical testing has proven it virtually impossible to breech the lock resulting only in severe defamation of the grille.'

Breec means buttocks, among other things, but a breach would probably cause deformation not libel. And NatWest Bank sends a three-paragraph letter that manages to misspell 'writing', 'inconvenience' and 'unfortunately'...as well as getting a crucial date wrong by a mere two months. Nagging worry: if these outfits are so careless with their language, what are they like with their products and services?

You might expect more attention to detail from the chief executive and house governor of an eye hospital, but you'd be disappointed:

'Unfortunately your appointment for 26 January had to be cancelled because there were no clinics running that day. It is normal practice for access to all clinics for this day being denied, however this was not possible on this occasion due to the outreach clinics still running.'

Which is not only meaningless garbage, but ungrammatical and badly punctuated meaningless garbage. It proceeds with a triumphant three-mistake sentence:

'I again would like to reiterate that all cancelled appointment are reviewed [...] by the Senior Optometrist, to ensure it is medical safe to delay the patient.'

The letter concludes: 'I hope this clarifies the situation.'

Semi-literacy also afflicts government offices. The contributions office at Long Benton writes to me:

'If there is any unforeseen delays we will still collect national insurance contributions for the period.'

Even an infant knows that 'is any ... delays' is bad English. And what if the delays aren't 'unforeseen' – will there be no collection then? The letter goes on to say that the office will take a £10 direct debit from me on '28/02/35'. Really? I will then be 92 years old, you crazy people, unless writing rage has killed me first.

A local leisure centre provides no respite:

'Dear Mr X: Regarding to your visit at the cafeteria last Sunday. I am 'sorry' to hear that you were treated unfairly, when you had made a complaint to the catering staff about a hair in your meal. I can only ensure that this never happens again in the future, however I have spoken to my staff about this matter, and would like to send our full apologises to you.'

Doesn't even the sleepest student of a secretarial college know that the first sentence isn't finished? Then, 'regarding to' isn't English, never has been, never will be. Passing over 'visit at' with a shudder, why put quotes around 'sorry' – are they to cast doubt on the sorrow or purely ornamental? And, dear author, you cannot 'ensure' it never happens again, unless you personally stand over



• But don't worry too much: this shopfront's ornamental apostrophe is in Bastia, Corsica.

every dish of food that's served. And let's cross out 'in the future', since this horrible hairiness of meals cannot happen in the past. Thank you, though, for the 'apologises'.

Companies lose business because their letters are so illiterate they damage customer confidence. Would anyone want to book again with the London travel firm whose response to a complaint included this:

'The 2 flights you must appreciate that we are charged adult fares firstly.'

Virgin Trains is author of several comparable classics, including this in a letter dated 31 August 1999:

'In order to re-evaluate and re-position the First Day Club we have decided to close it down with effect from 31st August 1999...'

Now that's what I call repositioning. About its half-price fares offer, Virgin states:

'While all other trains companies have agreed to sell tickets at half price on Virgin routes, they have chosen not to also join the promotion and discount the fares on their routes.'

As a sentence, that would be C minus if written by a French boy learning English. For a native English speaker on behalf of a national 'trains company' in a printed leaflet, it is woeful. Perhaps it meant:

'All other train companies have agreed to sell tickets at half price on Virgin routes, but not on their own routes.'

Shockers also appear in instruction leaflets for flat-pack furniture and other DIY products. The John Lewis store says this in its notes for assembling the Suffolk bunk bed:

'Please Note: This Bunk Bed is designed so that the routes of all four panels are visable when viewed from the Foot End of the assembled bed, i.e. The Head End panels face into the bed & the Foot End panels face away from the bed.'

Leaving aside the misspellings and crazy capitalization, what is 'routes' supposed to mean? Are we meant to drive the bed through the streets? Lewis's is happy with it, though. The director of buying and hard furnishings dismisses the complaint:

'The word routes is a manufacturing term coming from router, the machine that creates grooves. I am not aware that our customers find this difficult to understand. To date we have not had any other comments with (sic) this sentence.'

Over at Lewis's games counter, the instructions for playing draughts betray their foreign origins:

'Then man placed on top is one of those captured by your opponent which he returns to you a King. can be moved backwards diagonally. If there are several men on the board with vacent squares behind them, they may be all captured at once. In this case the

Talking man is placed on the vacant diagonally behind the last man.'

Lewis's is more contrite about this one. Its director of buying and furniture accessories describes it as 'appalling' and promises to get it changed.

At the other end of the scale is Mr Pompous, determined to show off the long words he knows. Invariably he has a posh job title. The 'director of quality' of a Staffordshire college wrote this recently to a complaining student:

'From the plethora of letters that have been received from you...it is impossible to determine what is the gravamen of your complaint.'

Lexiphanic and sesquipedalian that may be, but it was easily bested by the 60-page booklet John Major's government gave to every household in Northern Ireland. It included a sentence of 121 words and used officialese like 'quantum of public expenditure', 'unicameral', 'ultra vires', 'weighted majority', 'adumbrated' and 'totality of relationships', all without explanation. One Belfast woman gave her verdict in a radio interview:

'I would like somebody to explain it to us all in words that we can understand. I want plain English. I want it set down in front of me so that I can understand it and I can go to my children and say, this is what's happening.'

Another said a unicameral must be a creature in Belfast zoo. Good English has a convincing ring about it. It seems unforced, even when it's been carefully contrived. When next you buy a sandwich from Pret A Manger, the paper bag is worth a read. It says simply this:

'Every Pret has its own kitchen. We don't have a factory. We make our sandwiches, baguettes and PretWraps one by one, right here, throughout the day. You won't find sell-by dates and storage information on our sandwiches and wraps. If our fresh food doesn't sell out each day we give it away to charity rather than compromise our standards.'

Plain, simple English, with real full stops and commas positioned with care by a profitable company with a sky-high reputation. Is writing really that easy? It can't be, otherwise more firms would do it. But is it too much to ask that they might try?

Motorized omnibus ukases transmogrified

Guy Gibson, a former bus-driver with Trent Buses in Derbyshire, took matters into his own hands when confronted with the company's bemusing textbook. In 2001 Mr Gibson, now a training officer, translated its 183 rules into readable prose, much of which was adopted.

Instead of 'Ensure the potential impact of non-routine factors and problems and other services are assessed and details notified promptly to an appropriate person', his guidance says, 'Inform the depot if you are stuck in traffic or involved in an accident.' And when a bus is full, instead of advice to drivers that says, 'Where passengers cannot be accepted because of the potential overload of the vehicle, you should inform positively of the situation and where possible provide appropriate information as to how to complete the journey', Mr Gibson's version suggests they say 'Sorry, we're full. There will be another one along in a few minutes.'

Movers, shakers and stirrers

Plain-language exponents don't spend their entire lives scratching away at legal documents and official forms. They also have to put themselves through a gruelling schedule of cocktail parties, receptions with the King of Sweden and long-distance flights to exotic and romantic conference locations. Here we catch a few of them in these off-duty moments



Robert Eagleson, his wife Muriel, and Joe Kimble take to the boats during a conference in Sweden in 1992. As a professor of English literature, Eagleson has added some much-needed academic weight to the plain-language movement in his native Australia and around the world, working closely with government departments and law firms. Joe Kimble has been a leading voice on plain legal language, particularly in the US, where his professorship at the Thomas Cooley Law School, Michigan has enabled him to influence some of the next generation of legal writers. He is president of Clarity.



Aarhus, Denmark, 1994. Among those pictured, front row: Mark Adler (former chair of Clarity), Chris Balmford (Words and Beyond, Australia), David Elliott (law drafter, Canada); back row, centre, Peter Butt (co-author, *Modern Legal Drafting*). **Right:** Martin Cutts with Barbro Ehrenberg-Sundin and Bengt Baedecke, Swedish Justice Ministry, Stockholm 2001.



R Desikan and his wife Nirmala during a break from a plain-language workshop in Madras (Chennai), 1993. Both have been formidable advocates of plain language and other consumer causes in India, where for many years Desikan was chairman of Fedcot, the Federation of Consumer Organizations of Tamilnadu.



Phil Knight, a Canadian lawyer who has written large chunks of the South Africa constitution, with Judith Bennett (Centre for Plain Legal Language, Sydney, Australia) in Salisbury, England, 1993.



End of a licence to print rhubarb

Many chunks of legalese have been redrafted since 1979. Paulo Scritti looks at one – that great British institution, the TV licence

Once upon a time, 17 million people in the UK used to buy a TV licence that was written in such archaic language it could have been drafted by Moses. It began like this:

1. The person named below (hereinafter called 'the Licensee') is hereby licensed subject to the terms, provisions and limitations set out in the Schedule –
 - (a) to instal apparatus for wireless telegraphy at the premises shown below, in so far as these premises are in the occupation of the Licensee
 - (b) to use the said apparatus for the purposes of receiving visual images sent by television from authorised Broadcasting Stations for general reception and from licensed amateur stations which can be exhibited by the said apparatus either in monochrome only or, if the licence includes colour, in any colour or colours.
2. (1) This clause shall apply where the Licensee occupies the said premises as a private residence.
(2) The Licensee is hereby licensed to use for the purposes stated in paragraph (b) of Clause 1, whether or not in the said premises, apparatus for wireless telegraphy consisting of one or more portable television broadcast receiving sets, provided that when used otherwise than in the said premises, any such set is operated by a battery or batteries, wholly contained within the set and is not permanently installed in any premises or other place.

Instead of bowing down and worshipping before this sacred text, Martin Cutts wrote to the Home Office in 1980 to protest that sentences of 120 words and dreadful layout meant that nobody could understand the document without severe pain. The Home Office tried the old defence of hiding behind the lawyer's skirts: 'This licence form will be the actual licence issued to the applicant.' (Er...yes, we have bought one so we know that.) 'It is a legal document and that is why it is written in legal phraseology.' (Er... being a legal document doesn't mean it has to sound archaic or arcane.) 'We will certainly have another look at the form in the light of your letter.' (Oh, goody.)

Pressed further, the Home Office fell silent for a year or two until, suddenly, a new-style TV licence emerged. The equivalent section began:

This licence applies to the person named below (the licence holder) and any member of his/her family and domestic staff while they are living with him/her at the address shown below.

No more legal phraseology, no more guff. In 2004, the UK still has its TV licences. They start even more tersely now, with a rather odd list structure that's a bit heavy on cross-references:

What this licence allows:

- you and any person living at the premises occupied by you at the above address (but please see overleaf)
- to install and use colour and black and white receivers at the premises and, in the circumstances described overleaf, elsewhere
- subject to the conditions overleaf
- until 31 December 2004

But it's come a long way. Legalese – the game is nearly up.

Emma Wagner, formerly a departmental head in the European Commission's translation service, on the war against Eurojargon

Fighting Eurofog

A group of translators started the Fight the Fog campaign in 1998. We wanted to encourage EC authors and translators to write clearly, in the language of the real world, and to close the gap between the EU institutions and the public. Linguistic clarity is just one part of the general 'transparency and accountability' package so urgently needed in the institutions.

Translators were the prime movers because fog is demoralizing to translate and we are often blamed for it. Many EU documents are written in Euro-English and then have to be translated into all the other official languages. For a linguist who cares about language, routinely translating bad English is like being a top chef and spending your working day frying cut-price fish fingers.

We produced a distinctive logo for the campaign and a booklet, *How To Write Clearly*, provided a series of lectures from journalists, politicians and plain-English experts, and gave seminars to more than 600 staff. The booklet and lectures are on a website at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/translation/en/ftfog>. We found several factors militating against clarity:

Drafting by non-native speakers – Non-native speakers can't be expected to know what sounds natural in English. Even native speakers lose this sensitivity when working outside their mother-tongue environment.

Growth of English – English has supplanted French as the main language inside the EU institutions. So in an organization where many different nationalities work together, some mistakes have to be tolerated.

Fear of brevity – Some authors in the EU institutions come from a culture where concision is not a virtue.

Eurojargon – Jargon and abstruse acronyms may aid communication between specialists but if they spill over into the wrong context, they are irritating and sound ridiculous.

'Consensus building' – In the desire to secure agreement at any cost, documents are sometimes inflated – and their logic distorted – by the inclusion of disparate material. Foggy language helps to achieve an appearance of political consensus.

The campaign has had several good results including more demand for the translation service to edit texts before translation, and clear instructions to produce shorter documents which are less costly to translate. So far, though, some EC lawyers have seemed reluctant to adopt the new drafting conventions recommended by such people as Martin Cutts in *Clarifying Eurolaw* and Peter Butt and Richard Castle in *Modern Legal Drafting*. With political support, I hope that some of the campaign's suggested innovations, such as a citizen's summary for regulations and directives, will become reality.

There is a general concern to improve public understanding of the EU. Many websites on the Europa information portal have been redesigned and rewritten with less fog. All EU legislation is now available there, free of charge, in the EUR-Lex section of Europa (<http://europa.eu.int>). Most recently, the Seville European Council in June 2002 called for written Council conclusions to be concise and simplified. Let's hope, for the sake of the EU, that this will lead to concrete results too.

Great Gobbets of Gobbledygook

Refusing a subordinate's request for a pay rise, who said...

1 Because of the fluctuational pre-disposition of your position's productive capacity as juxtaposed to government standards, it would be momentarily injudicious to advocate an increment.

Whose response to a complaint about late trains was...

2 All aspects of our operation are constantly being monitored and pressure is exerted wherever possible to catalyse an improvement to the punctuality and reliability of our services... We do welcome your feedback in such circumstances as it is seen as adding valuable weight to our functions [sic] efforts in improving [sic] all areas of our service provision.

After exposing a pop singer's star-encrusted nipple on national TV, who described the incident as merely...

3 A wardrobe malfunction.

In a political speech, who said...

4 Ideas which stress the growing importance of international co-operation and new theories of economic sovereignty across a wide range of areas: macro-economics, trade, the environment, the growth of post neo-classical endogenous growth theory and the symbiotic relationships between growth and investment in people and infrastructure, a new understanding of how labour markets really work and the rich and controversial debate over the meaning and importance of competitiveness at the level of individuals, the firm or the nation and the role of government in fashioning modern industrial policies which focus on maintaining competitiveness.

IDENTIFY THE WORST JARGONAUT OF THE LAST 25 YEARS

Here are ten of the finest gems of the jargon genre from our archives. You just have to decide who was the speaker or author from the list shown bottom right. Answers are on page 7. And why not additionally put the undernoted exemplifications in sequential prioritization mode?

Who won a Royal Town Planning Institute gobbledygook prize for this...

5 The project approach facilitates the investigation and implementation of policies, through an action-oriented, detailed-level compromise process.

Who complained about a hamburger stall in this sniffy language...

6 We remain convinced that the effluxion of oleaginous fumes has killed at least one tree, and probably two shrubs in the garden slip over the wall from the stall.

Which political leader explained his credo like this...

7 We offer the party as a big tent. How we do that (recognize the big tent philosophy) within the platform, the preamble to the platform or whatnot, that remains to be seen. But that message will have to be articulated with great clarity.

Whose district plan rejected an everyday word in favour of planning jargon...

8 Line 5. Delete 'Bottlenecks', insert 'Localized Capacity Deficiencies'.

Who defined play like this...

9 Play is the freely chosen and personally directed enactment of a group of non-goal orientated behaviours which become progressively more complex with experience and which in

themselves facilitate the development of an equivalent range of tools (ie skills and abilities) without which any species evolution cannot continue.

Who responded thus to a complaint that the early-morning express lacked a breakfast carriage...

10 Whilst I can readily appreciate your frustration at the loss of breakfast, since in the circumstances you describe it is unfortunately true that in many cases where a catering vehicle becomes defective and both stores and equipment need to be transferred into a replacement car, this can only be done during a trains [sic] journey. It is not, of course, possible to make the transfer whilst vehicles are in the sidings and the intensity of coach working is such that the train sets are not available to be put into a platform at other times to enable the transfer to be carried out. We are very concious [sic] of the need to reduce instances of failure and provide the advertised service to the minimum...

Choose from these authors

- A Northern Spirit Limited (train operator)
- B Gordon Brown, chancellor of the exchequer
- C Justin Timberlake, pop singer
- D Hertfordshire County Council Planning Department
- E British Rail's Train Catering Division
- F St Helens Play Council
- G Alexander Haig, US secretary of state
- H Dan Quayle, former US vice-president
- I Hammersmith & Fulham Council
- J The bursar of Emmanuel College, Cambridge University