

Executive Team – for assurance

Meeting agenda title: Internal Communications – using plain, clear, humanising language and supporting keeping it clear training

Meeting date: 9 June 2022

Time required: 20 minutes

Presenter: Jen Green

1. Objective and recommendation

- 1.1. This report provides ET with information of the internal comms plan to support using plain language.

2. History and dependencies

- 2.1. ET requested this report at its May 2022 meeting.

3. Matters to consider to achieve objective

- 3.1. The way we write needs to change. Confidently describing the impact of our work and the actions we need to take has never been more important.
- 3.2. As ICO25, law reform and internal programmes of significant change become part of our everyday language and priorities, we must make sure the work we're doing has as much impact as possible. Powerful communication is fundamental to making that happen.
- 3.3. John highlighted the importance of clear and plain language in a recent internal blog and we've seen the impact of humanising the story of our regulatory action with the impactful external Operation Edessa comms. We also know the impact of clear, plain, humanised communications on successful internal change projects, and without them, that people struggle to understand what is happening and why its important.
- 3.4. As well as supporting our Keeping It Clear and Writing to Influence training, we propose a wider campaign with broad and board commitment from SLT and ET with the determination to deliver quantifiable improvements. There are two elements to the changes we need to see, the first is writing in line with our codified expectations in the style guide. The second is humanising our work through language and relatable storytelling.

- 3.5. This isn't a quick fix, there are things we can do now to amplify the problem and the solution, which are set out below but there will be a long term plan with commitment to embed the approach, helping ensure it isn't a one-off fix.
- 3.6. We've all read overlong board papers, internal messages that don't quite tell us what we need to know, or lengthy pieces about our regulatory work that spell out what the law says but don't describe the impact on people. To be the modern, fit for the future regulator and employer we want to be, we need to take action to improve. We must lead from the top and offer support to managers and senior leaders in setting clear expectations – and examples – for others to follow.
- 3.7. Finally, Jen Green will be ET sponsor for this campaign to demonstrate ET commitment and track improvement through the change and transformation programme.

4. Areas for challenge

- 4.1. Anything obvious missing from the campaign plan?
- 4.2. Any urgent priorities – problems you see regularly that you'd like us to amplify now?
- 4.3. Budget? In principle, are you content for us to spend money on external courses and membership/crystal marks with Plain English Campaign?
- 4.4. Do you have good or bad examples we could share with everyone? This could be papers/messages – internal or external

5. Wider internal comms campaign to include the following and starting immediately

- 5.1. Campaign objectives:
 - To amplify the importance of the way we write for all colleagues
 - To improve understanding about the expectations for our written work
 - To humanise and use plain language to describe our work, including guidance, for internal and external audiences
 - To use plain, clear language internally using storytelling where appropriate

- To increase and report on completion of training
- To identify measures of success and report on this to CEB.

Audience	Channel	Key message / call to action	From
All staff	Training – in person and online	Setting standard we expect	Corp comms team
All staff	Leading Ways – leadership newsletter	Senior colleague journey through training and conscious improvement	Senior leadership (requires a senior leader to attend the training and identify their improvements as a result).
All staff	Leading Ways, weekly word, intranet	Technical expert (eg lawyer) highlighting importance of plain language in landing their messages	Senior leadership/internal comms
Senior leaders	Senior leader briefing	Highlight common issues, discuss how we can support teams to change and improve	ET/comms (Corp comms to identify some before and after examples eg Edessa)
All staff	Weekly word, intranet	Regular promotion of KIC guide, highlighting a different part each time	Internal comms

Audience	Channel	Key message / call to action	From
All staff	Intranet/weekly word	Examples of plain language helping to land our external messages, pointing out the differences. eg Edessa	Corp comms
All staff	Intranet/weekly word	Examples of good/bad plain language helping land internal messages that affect your day to day work	Internal comms (Corp comms / CEB to identify some before and after examples)
Managers	In person/online training	KIC training – how to constructively comment Manager briefing coming from ET sponsor	Corp comms
Initially to senior leaders then all	Intranet/weekly word/SLB	Membership of Plain Language Campaign and applying for crystal mark	Internal comms
Comms staff and 'champions'	Intranet/weekly word/team meetings	External courses to improve expertise and then 'before and after' examples	Internal comms/Corp comms

Audience	Channel	Key message / call to action	From
Managers	Direct to managers/inclusion in Challenge session compliance mandatory training figures	Sign up/completion rates for internal courses	Corp comms/L&D
Managers	Commissioning brief	Include the style guide in the commissioning brief to remind people about the expectations for our written work.	Corporate Governance

5.2. The actions above rely on there being a strong foundation of knowledge about how we write for impact. To date, Corporate Communications have developed the following:

- **Introduction to Keeping it clear**

The Introduction to Keeping it clear training familiarises colleagues with our style guide and the rules we need to follow for consistency in our writing at the ICO. This is a recorded training session and 389 colleagues have listened to it to date. This is mandatory for all new starters, as well as acting as a valuable refresher for any colleague to complete when needed.

- **Writing to influence**

The Writing to influence sessions are aimed at developing written communication skills. We have now completed these sessions for all staff who have been nominated by their managers. Although not mandatory training, this has involved every department at the ICO and in many cases everyone in the department has attended. In total, 647 staff have attended (591 of which are currently active users).

The Writing to influence training has given each attendee an awareness of what we expect them to consider when they are writing. It gives us a base line for expectations which we can refer to when commenting on others' written work.

6. Next steps

- 6.1. In order to build on this and ensure that colleagues continue to apply these principles in their writing, we are now preparing the roll out of phase two.
- 6.2. We have, to date taken a very supportive, inclusive approach to developing our common understanding. To make the improvements we require at pace, we need to be more directive, expecting colleagues, at all levels, to see this as an important part of their day job.
- 6.3. With that in mind the following outlines the training offer for all colleagues as well as the role that Corporate Communications will play to safeguard our published communications and our reputation.

Training:

- **Writing to influence training available on i-learn.** This will be mandatory training for all colleagues. Although a generic session would be appropriate for most colleagues, we will create a separate recording for PADPC. This allows us to use examples about responding to complaints that are less relevant to other departments. Senior leaders will be asked to show leadership and ensure that they attend, as well as encourage their teams to attend.
- **Develop an e-learning module.** Corporate Communications would work with WDP to develop this. This is a mandatory annual check-up for staff on how well they recall some of the rules covered in the Keeping it clear guide.
- **Offer in-depth training in specific departments.** Corporate Communications to offer further online training sessions in small groups focussed on a team's own writing examples. This would build on the existing Writing to influence training and assume a level of knowledge about the Keeping it clear guide.

Editorial support:

- **Introduce an editorial review checklist.** Before an editorial review colleagues would be expected to complete the checklist. This would include the basics that authors need to look out for, including following the instructions in the Keeping it clear guide. This would make our expectations clear about the standard of documents we expect to receive. If authors have not completed this then they will be asked to update the work.

- **Update the Keeping it clear guide.** We will complete a quick refresh of the Keeping it clear style guide. For example, changing 'individuals' to 'people' and an explanation of what we mean by humanising our writing. In the longer-term we will carry out a more comprehensive update of the style guide.
- 6.4. As we further develop our common understanding, the editorial team will need to be positioned as our vanguards for our humanising approach. This is will mean that will take a more proactive role in challenging the tone and approach of our work, ensuring that it meets the set standards and drives ongoing improvement.

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List of Annexes: None

Publication decision: Report can be published internally and externally

Outcome reached: