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## Minister campaigns to use plain language for dealing with public

A campaign to use simple language on all official forms in one of the biggest Government Department's has been launched by Social and Family Affairs Minister Mary Coughlan.

Simple English will be the hallmark of leaflets, application forms, letters and advertisements from the Department of Social and Family Affairs which makes over 938,900 payments every week benefiting about 1.5million people.

"It is troubling that a quarter of Irish adults are reported to have difficulty with simple literacy tasks. This initiative will lead to the implementation of a plain English policy so that the information we provide is accessible to all our customers," said Minister Coughlan.

"Governments are infamous for using gobbeldy-gook and this campaign will ensure that simple language that means exactly what it says is used throughout my Department.

"Helping people access information and public services is a proven way to empower people. Every citizen comes into contact with my Department at some time in their life, either as a child, a pensioner, someone who is ill, loses their job or needs support. Applying for a benefit shouldn't be difficult or off-putting – and making the language used in all our communications with the public simpler will make access easier and less intimidating.

"Many of the schemes helping people who are ill, unemployed, or disadvantaged can be complex and detailed - and therefore difficult to understand and explain. I hope that this initiative will help people claim their entitlements," added Minister Coughlan.

Minister Coughlan is funding the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) to employ a development worker, Ms Clodagh McCarthy, who has just commenced work on the campaign. She will work with the Department in developing a plain English policy and a literacy friendly "in house" style, designing literacy awareness training for staff, reviewing and revising leaflets, application forms, letter formats and in initiating research into strategies that complement or replace the use of the written word in communications.

Ms McCarthy said, "This is a marvellous opportunity to apply plain language principles for the benefit of thousands of people. It is an initiative that other organisations who deal with the public should adopt. I look forward to working with Minister Coughlan's Department in revising the extensive written information they provide. The task is a demanding one, considering the complexity of the schemes involved, but it will be rewarding for all those involved."

**ENDS**

**7<sup>TH</sup> September 2003**



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**Note for News Editors**

National Literacy Statistics

In the 1997 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), 25% of the Irish population were found to be at the lowest level of literacy. The IALS found that people needed most help with reading information from government agencies and filling out application forms.

National Adult Literacy Agency

NALA was established in 1980. It is a membership organization with voluntary status, concerned with national co-ordination, training and policy development in adult literacy work in Ireland. Its mission is to ensure that all adults with reading and writing difficulties have access to high quality literacy provision.