

XXXX
by email to XXXX

Dear XXXX,

XXXX
Head of Internal Communications
CD I
Department for Transport
5/03 Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DR
Direct Line: 0207 944 XXXX
XXXX@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Web Site: www.dft.gov.uk

Our Ref: 000728

7 February 2011

Freedom of information request

I am writing to confirm that the Department has now completed its search for the information which you requested on 21 January 2011.

Since 1 May 2010, guidance has been published on the Department's intranet for staff drafting ministerial correspondence. Staff have also been advised of the Secretary of State's preference for expressing distance in miles rather than kilometres.

The Department and its agencies publish guidance on writing in plain language which is periodically updated. Since May 2010, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency have updated their list of technical terms and preferred alternatives.

Copies of the information on the intranet pages are below.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the Freedom of Information Act, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. The Department will, therefore, be simultaneously releasing to the public the information you requested, together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context.

If you are unhappy with the way the Department has handled your request or with the decisions made in relation to your request you may complain within two calendar months of the date of this letter by writing to the Department's Information Rights Unit at:

Zone D/04
Ashdown House
Sedlescombe Road North
Hastings
East Sussex TN37 7GA
E-mail: FOI-Advice-Team-DFT@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Please see attached details of DfT's complaints procedure and your right to complain to the Information Commissioner.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact Rachel Hersey in the DfT Press Office on 020 7944 3232. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

XXXX

Your right to complain to the Department and the Information Commissioner

You have the right to complain within two calendar months of the date of this letter about the way in which your request for information was handled and/or about the decision not to disclose all or part of the information requested. In addition a complaint can be made that DfT has not complied with its FOI publication scheme.

Your complaint will be acknowledged and you will be advised of a target date by which to expect a response. Initially your complaint will be re-considered by the official who dealt with your request for information. If, after careful consideration, that official decides that his/her decision was correct, your complaint will automatically be referred to a senior independent official who will conduct a further review. You will be advised of the outcome of your complaint and if a decision is taken to disclose information originally withheld this will be done as soon as possible.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF

Going the extra mile (not kilometre) - 22/10

The Secretary of State has requested that the Department should use miles as the standard form of measurement when describing transport rather than kilometres, for instance in relation to lengths of road, as this is more readily understandable to the majority of people.

Therefore with immediate effect all briefing, submissions and (particularly) external communications should use miles rather than kilometres.

Drafting correspondence for the Secretary of State

- For letters to Members of Parliament the Secretary of State would like to keep letters to under a page where possible. They should be written in such a way that they could be sent onto a constituent.
- Make sure that grammar and punctuation are double checked.
- Covering notes (for letters to MPs/stakeholders/interdepartmental correspondence) should be avoided as a rule. The only exceptions would be instances where there are complex issues which Ministers need to consider before responding to a letter.
- There is no need to provide a covering note/submission which summarises the original letter – you can assume that the Secretary of State will read it himself.
- Please keep letters as brief as possible but ensure all points or issues are addressed.
- Use simple, direct language and avoid jargon. Always spell out acronyms the first time they are used.
- Do not put in too many adverbs. For example avoid phrases like “strongly opposed” and just say “opposed”.
- Avoid passive construction at the start of sentences e.g. “it is essential to note that”. “However” should only be used at the start of a sentence and do not use the word “firstly”.
- Do not use abbreviated forms such as “don’t” or “couldn’t”.
- Draft responses should be sent via the MINCOM system.

Norman Baker's box arrangements and working methods

Drafting correspondence

- Please avoid the use of contractions in formal writing. **Example:** “that’s” should read “that is”.
- Avoid the use of hyperbole and keep language as ‘down to earth’ as possible. **Example:** “I am absolutely delighted that this new scheme has the potential to be a true gateway to increased public transport.” Should read “I am pleased that this new scheme will help get more people on to buses.”
- In general, letters should be ended with either “I hope that this reply helps to clarify the position.” (Where we are being factual rather than particularly helpful) or “I hope this reply is helpful.” (Where the recipient is likely to welcome the response.)
- MSU responses should be one page in length where possible. However, two pages are fine where needed. Letters should only run onto a 3rd page if exceptional detail is required.

Mike Penning's box arrangements and working methods

MSUs

- The minister would like to make his responses to correspondence as personal as possible, so please bear this in mind when you are drafting replies; please use the first person where possible.
- Your draft should address all the questions posed by the MP and/or constituent. If one of the questions is not within your policy area, please liaise with whoever the responsible policy lead is. Private Office and MSU can help you find the right person if you are having difficulty.
- Aim to limit responses to one page. The Minister accepts that some replies will run to two pages where a detailed answer is required, but has asked that officials try to keep to one page wherever possible.
- If there is a campaign on any topic, standard lines need to be agreed, so that each campaign letter receives the same response from the Minister. If you become aware of a campaign affecting your policy area, please inform Private Office so that they can make the minister aware of it.
- First paragraph should always read along the lines of: 'Thank you for your letter of 18 February enclosing correspondence from your constituent Mr A Smith, address and postcode, regarding the M4 bus lane.'
- If the MP originally wrote to SofS, MoS or the other PUSS, first paragraph should read 'Thank you for your letter of 18 February to **SofS/MoS/PUSS name** enclosing correspondence from your constituent Mr A Smith, address and postcode, regarding the M4 bus lane. I am replying as minister responsible for the Strategic Road Network.'
- First mention of the Department should read 'Department for Transport' – further mentions just 'the Department' or 'DfT'. If abbreviations eg DfT, VOSA, MCA appear in the letter, make sure the full name is spelled out at the first mention, with the abbreviation in brackets eg 'this matter is the responsibility of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)'.
- For Right Honourable MPs, letters should be addressed to "Rt Hon Joe Bloggs MP".
- If the letter refers to an enclosure/attachment, make sure this is attached to the case when you return it or sent in hard copy to MSU.

Writing for the MCA

This guide is for Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) staff and those who work on MCA projects. It will help us to make sure that our writing is customer-focused, professional, clear, authoritative and consistent.

1. Your language

Before you begin writing, think about your readers. Who are they, what do you want to tell them and why? You may write for technical readers where certain terms and jargon are easily understood. Or you may write for more general readers. Whoever you are targeting, make sure that your language is as clear and direct as possible. Remember that some of our readers will be seafarers whose first language is not English.

People expect us, as a government agency to be professional. They will be unforgiving of spelling and grammar errors so proofread your writing rather than rely on a spell-checker.

Always use the best everyday word or phrase that most people would understand.

On the following page there are some words and phrases that we use at the MCA, and their more everyday alternatives. You can get a more detailed list from the MCA Communication Branch. Sometimes a technical word or phrase will be right for your readers. In this case use it, but think about explaining the term to make it easier to understand for a wider audience.

Initiate broadcast action Ask for help from passing vessels

Search stood down or terminated Search finished or ended

Wind force 8,10,12 and so on Gale force, storm force, hurricane force and so on

EPIRB (emergency position indicating radio beacon) Emergency locator beacon

Merchant vessel or seafarer Specify. For example wood carrier or engineer

4.00 am in the morning or 0400 UTC Local time (see *Date and Time* page 23)

Gross Tonnage (always use this, not GRT or other ship measurement)

In many cases GRT (the volume of the ship) will be appropriate – you could explain it in brackets as above. In some cases you might want to consider another explanation of the size of the vessel (for example if you are writing for children something like ‘the length of two football pitches might be more appropriate’)

Pan pan, mayday and relays Explain the term, for example ‘the master of the ship broadcast a pan pan message asking for urgent help from other ships in the area’

Fixed wing aircraft Plane

Wash Explain, for example waves caused by a boat as it moves through the water

Swell Use wave height

The ship was in ballast The ship was not carrying a cargo

Proceed Go to

To task To send

Persons, female, male or individual People, woman, man, person

Vessel Type of vessel for example yacht, cargo ship or tanker

Emergency towing vessel Tug

Deploy Send, put out or launch

Initiate Start or begin