Easy-Read Study Report

for

The Shaw Trust Equality and Diversity Group

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Contents

Section 1: Background and Introduction

This was small exploratory study commissioned by Shaw Trust at the request of the Equality and Diversity Group, which represents the interests of people with learning disabilities operating within the trust. In line with the study specification, the main purpose was to "identify a suitable method of providing information in an easy read format to people with learning disabilities." This group may also include those with additional physical, hearing, speech and sight disabilities. This is an important issue acknowledged through recent European and UK policy initiatives, reports and legislation.[1] For example, the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 makes it unlawful to treat disabled people less favourably than others for a reason relating to their disability, and more recently in 1999, the act stated that service providers have to make reasonable adjustments to their services to make them accessible to disabled people.

Clearly, the way that written texts are presented to people with learning disabilities can influence both their ability to access and understand the information being provided, and ultimately, their potential to communicate their ideas through written means. If people are unable to interpret and understand such information, then they become dependant on others to read and write on their behalf, which may reduce not only their prospects for articulating their views and opinions, but also their potential for making decisions for themselves based on informed choices. It is also important because of the ever-increasing amount of information being translated into easy read formats. These include, for example, the websites of Shaw Trust, Mencap, the Opportunity Housing Trust, Home Farm Trust, and many EU funded projects. Indeed, most EU funded projects in the area of learning disabilities stipulate the need to develop materials that are accessible to the client group. Without proper research, it is difficult to state the extent that the easy read formats used actually result in written texts being more accessible for the users.

The implementation of such approaches also incurs financial and resource costs to the translating organisation, increasing the need to identify the merits and gains of the approaches against the resource and financial inputs required for their delivery. Given the recommendations from the Shaw Trust easy read group, the formats will be focussed around the Shaw Trust 'Code of Conduct' that forms part of the Equality and Diversity Policy within the organisation. This has the advantage of allowing the study to focus on the accessibility of a specific written text that is current, and forms part of working document within the trust.

Easy Read Guidance and Research

There have been few empirical studies on the accessibility of easy read materials relating to translating written texts. However, much of the literature provides useful guidance about the best use of symbols and pictures in general to assist people with learning disabilities to interpret written signs and instructions[2]. In general, research in the area suggests there are 3 basic components to the easy read approach. These are:

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[1] For example: The Disability Discrimination Act 1996, The Disability Discrimination Act Annual Report, 2004, The special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. The Disability Rights Commission

[2] Norah Fry Research Department (2003) Good Signs - Improving Signs for People with a Learning Disability. Report to the Disability Rights Commission.

I)   The use of Plain English;
II)   The use of Pictures and/or symbols;
III)   The use of auditory accompaniments, such as 'Speak-easy'[3] and 'Browse'.

Due to resource limitations we were unable to expand the scope of this study to include formats involving auditory accompaniment. Initially, the authors piloted a free Adobe version. However, this proved to be unclear and too confusing for the participants and was dropped from the study following the first focus group and prior to the user interviews.

<u>Plain English</u>
The plain English approach simplifies Standard English texts, by replacing more complex words and sentences with words that describe the information at a less complex level. Much of the guidance emphasises the need to provide information that is comprehensible to the intended audience. For many people with learning disabilities this involves not only providing less complex words, but also structuring them within straightforward grammatical sentences that are enhanced by the format and presentation of the information. The British Law Society describes it thus:

> "The adoption of a plain English style demands simply that a document be written in a style which readily conveys its message to its audience. However, plain English is not concerned simply with the forms of language. Because its theme is communication, it calls for improvements in the organisation of the material and the method by which it is presented. It requires that material is presented in a sequence which the audience would expect and which helps the audience absorb the information. It also requires the document's design be as attractive as possible in order to assist readers to find their way through it."

For example, the following sentence taken from Shaw Trust's Code of Conduct is translated from the following Standard English text:

"Shaw Trust is the largest UK provider of training and employment services for disabled and disadvantaged people and is committed to achieving equality of opportunity and diversity".

Into:

"Shaw Trust is the biggest group in the UK that gives training to disabled people and other people who do not get good job chances. We try hard to give equal chances to everyone".

We think everyone should be treated with respect".

In the plain English version the paragraphs are smaller, the term 'largest', is simplified to 'biggest', while 'committed', becomes 'we try hard', and the relatively complex statement of 'achieving equality of opportunity and diversity', becomes 'trying hard to give equal chances to everyone'.

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[3] www.speak-easy.co.uk/ - 3k -

Researchers working on behalf of Hampshire Count Council[4] suggest a number of ways of maximising the accessibility of plain English text. These include:

> "using clear and simple text with short sentences, simple punctuation and no jargon using larger print, a clear typeface and plenty of spacing; using bullet points or story boxes and fact boxes to make the main points clear; only including information that is relevant to your audience, cutting out any confusing or unnecessary detail; and remembering you are writing for adults."

Clearly, one of the advantages that plain English has over other forms of easy read is that it enables information to be presented in a precise and consistent way to the person. This means that the sentences will not vary from one reading to the next, and that all the ideas and concepts that are intended to be relayed to the reader are. It is for this reason that other forms of easy read, such as those using pictures and symbols, are usually based upon and often accompanied with plain English text.[5] This approach intends to merge contextual information contained in the pictures, with the more precise narrative in the text. Many researchers have identified the need not only to understand all or some of the words in a sentence, but also that the reader needs to compile them in a logical order so that they make sense and can be placed in the wider topic context. One of the obvious disadvantages of using only plain English text is that it is not accessible to those who have limited or no reading skills.

Pictures and Symbols
The use of pictures to replace written text and/or verbal instructions has a long history in the area of learning disabilities. In Supported Employment, for example, they have been used as cues to represent the next routine or task step to be performed where employees find it difficult to remember the task sequence.[6], [7] They have also been used to help people to make more self-determined choices, reducing the tendency for acquiescence by providing a visual comparison of the choices available[8] and in developing Lifestories, where people construct a portfolio of their lives in pictures, usually through computers. Their use has also been extended to developing Person Centred Plans, using methods such a MAP and Pathways.[9],[10]

Without entering into the debate of what constitutes a picture, sign or a symbol, *in this study*, pictures are seen as portraying real people in real events set within a contextual background. A 'matchstick' drawing, without background, is more abstract in that it loses its context, but it also maintains much of how we perceive the image of a person to be. In this sense they are a halfway house that can be used universally whatever the text, but may lack the precision of more abstract symbols such as those used in

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[4] Hampshire County Council (2004) Access for All – Guidance on Clear Communications
http://www3.hants.gov.uk/logos/cx-logos-corporatestandards/cx-logos-accessforall.htm
[5] This includes Widgit, Photosymbols, Change for People and Symbliss.
[6] Martin, J., Rusch, F., James, V., Decker, P., & Triol, K., (1982). The use of picture cues to establish self-control in the preparation of meals by mentally retarded adults. Applied Research in Mental Retardation, 3, 105-109
[7] Wacker. D. & Berg. W. (1983). Effects of picture prompts on the acquisition of complex vocational tasks Journal of Applied Behaviour Analysis16, 417 – 433.
[8] Kilsby, M. & Beyer. S (2002) Increasing Self-determination in job matching – An intervention study Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation. 17, 2 125 - 135
[9] Towards Technology and Employment – Home Farm Trust – 2006.
[10] O'brien (2000) on 'Valuing People' -

Makaton. These often use shapes and signs that although universal and precise in their translations, provide few clues as to their meaning without learning the language, i.e., the association between the symbol and the word it represents.

Compared to pictures, symbols are less 'context bound'. This results from their utility at capturing smaller units of the text, or, in some instances an almost literal translation of each written word. One obvious example of this is Makaton[11] and British Sign Language.[12] In these examples, the symbols can be used to provide almost a word for word translation of the text in their grammatical order. Another example of this highly symbolised approach is 'Blissymbolics'[13]. Here shapes are used to substitute words and have been found effective for people with aphasia. [14]. However, although the symbols used in these approaches are more abstract using shapes rather than representations of real events involving people, they are not arbitrary and once learned, form highly efficient language systems in their own right. Blissymbolics, for example, uses 4 converging arrows to represent 'meeting', while a line denoted at the top of a square denotes 'sky' and a line at the bottom denotes 'earth'.

Example 2: 'BlissSymbolics'

Translates as: "Blissymbolics Communication International".

One of the disadvantages that symbol systems such as these have with regard to people with learning disabilities is that they would be required to learn the association between the symbols and the words they represent. If these symbols are highly stylised and relatively abstract in nature (as those above), then the reader would have to learn a new language system that translates the symbols into spoken words. This makes them inappropriate for this study, since they are of no use to those who have not learned the symbolic language.

Clearly, many pictures used to accompany written text intend to translate information to the reader about the content of sentences. As mentioned, this is a growth area reflected in an increase in supply and demand for easy read formats and 'translators'. The pictures used can vary from photographs to complex or plain drawings. The essential element is that they provide a broad summary of the text being presented. For example, 'Photosymbols' employ contextual photographs to represent words, and often uses images involving people with disabilities.[15] Below is an example from 'Change People' in association with the opening sentence of the Shaw Trust Code of Conduct with accompanying plain English text:

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[11] http://www.Makaton.com
[12]

[13] "Blissymbolics", A. Waller, *Good Lives, Good Communities* (2003). Invited Keynote, Western Australia, Perth, 12 August. Their Ref: 03/P12.
[14] http://www.blissymbolics.us/
[15]

Example 1: Change People

 = "Shaw Trust is the biggest group in the UK that gives training to disabled people and other people who do not get good job chances."

In this example the picture provides a broad context for the sentence focussing on the 'training' and the 'disabled people' aspects of the sentence. In line with advice from the Norah Fry Research Centre that suggests the use of universal signs, the Change People picture utilises the internationally recognised sign for disability. One of the disadvantages of using pictures in this way is that it would require an almost infinite picture bank to cover all the conceivable events and ideas that are presented through writing. Furthermore pictures cannot relay specific meaning of a text in the same way as writing. The picture struggles to relay the concepts of 'biggest', 'other people' and 'UK' as well as 'employment'.

Not all symbols are as abstract as those represented in Makaton and Blissymbolics. Widgit, for example, is growing in popularity and involves using a mixture of pictures and symbols to represent accompanying words. The example provides an illustration of the use of more abstract symbols, especially for adjoining words (eg, 'is' and 'the'), the use of universal signs (e.g., Union Jack to symbolise UK) along with pictures, used in this example to illustrate the caring and supporting elements of Shaw Trust. It also uses punctuation, with exclamation mark to provide the statement 'largest' with more impact.

Example 3: Widgit

Shaw   Trust   is   the   largest   UK
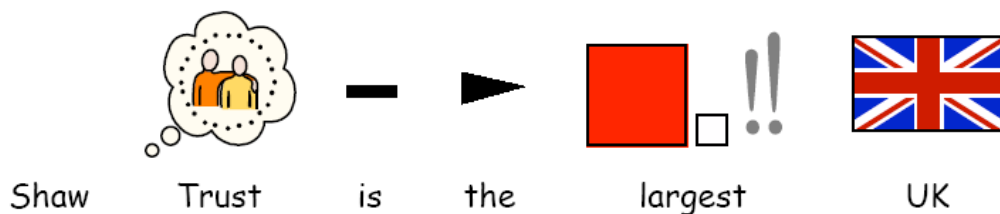
As with other approaches that employ symbols, the advantage is in being able to focus in on specific ideas and present them in their grammatical sequence. Unlike the picture example, the Widgit approach is able to represent the ideas of 'largest' and 'employment' (see Appendix 2). This means that some of the symbols are not context bound and can be used to convey information whatever the text. While this approach has the advantage of being more precise compared to pictures, and more accessible compared to formats that use more abstract symbols, it also has potential

disadvantages for the user group. First, as with other formats the more abstract symbols may be inaccessible to many, while the more pictorial representations may lack the clarity provided through Makaton and Blissymbolics.

Section 2: Study Design
The study specification requested that the study was conducted in a systematic way that ensured consistency of questions and some level of methodological rigour. The following method represents a balance between this need on the one hand, and resource limitations and the small sample size on the other.

Easy Read Formats
The literature review enabled the development of four easy read formats to be developed around the first paragraph of the Shaw Trust Code of Conduct. Makaton was discounted as an option for reasons argued earlier, as well as the prohibitive cost quoted to provide a translation of our sample text. Format 1 was the 'Plain English' version translated by a group of self-advocates from the Change People group and is shown in Appendix 1. Format 2 consisted of a 'Widgit' translation and a plain English text for accompaniment (Appendix 2). Format 3 was developed by 'Change People' and consisted of 3 black and white pictures providing overall contexts incorporating universal signs, plain English text (Appendix 3). Format 4 was developed by 'Inspired Services' employing more pictures (than the 'Change People' sample) each aimed at covering a single sentence. As with Widgit, the pictures and symbols are in colour (Appendix 4).

Stakeholder Focus Groups
Two focus groups were conducted to canvas the views and opinions of various stakeholders. The first focus group consisted of Shaw Trust Employees including: Two managers and client support from Palmer Gardens, an area manager for the S.W employment region, an administrative supporter at Workstep and a Development Officer for Shaw Trust Workstep. This group was held in a meeting room located in Shaw Trust's Palmer Garden Centre in Trowbridge. The second focus group consisted of a senior member of Human Resources in British Gas South Wales; an employer who runs a local jewellery retail store; a senior Mencap Pathways Officer who is involved directly with the delivery of supported employment; a Consultant and a Research Associate from Bristol University who is expert on 'Communicative Frames' for people with learning disabilities; and a 'People First' Facilitator. This group met in the office of the facilitators.

The stakeholder participants were asked to give their views about each format prompted by questions from the facilitators. These included asking them about their knowledge and experience of easy read formats and their views and opinions of each of the 4 formats presented to them. The questions put to the groups and their views are summarised in Section 3.

Service User Interviews/Sessions
Originally it was intended to run a third focus group with at least eight Shaw Trust employees with learning disabilities. However, the majority of the people available to participate in the focus group had relatively high reading skills and it became clear that those with higher reading abilities were biasing the group, being able to access the written information contained in the examples more readily than those with little

or no reading skills. Therefore, we decided to interview 12 clients on an individual basis and run sessions during which they were presented with each of the 4 formats. Obtaining participants from Palmer Gardens proved to be difficult due to uncertainties about the future of the project. Consequently, only 3 of the participants were Shaw Trust employees, while the remainder consisted of members of the People First Group, in Merthyr Tydfil, who kindly offered their co-operation for the study.

Prior to conducting the user sessions, permission was gained from each participant to record their views and opinions and use the information gathered in written reports and presentations. (See Appendix 5). It was explained to them that the information would be kept in the strictest confidence in line with the research code of conduct. The participants were asked their age and whether they used any sign language.

It was equally important to get the views and opinions of people with different reading abilities to reflect the range and diversity of users. This enabled us to see how people's different reading abilities reflected in their preferences for one format over others. The categories employed were based loosely on guidance from the authors of the British Picture Vocabulary Scale.[16] Three straightforward categories were employed. 1: 'Cannot read – no short words' describes those who could not interpret any form written information, even short words. 2: 'Reads short words and sentences' describes those who can read short words and interpret some sentences containing mainly short words, but who would struggle to make sense of most standard English texts. Some of those falling under this category could also recognise words that they had seen often, such as 'people and 'disabled' although relatively longer. 3: 'Fully reads Standard English' describes those who could read and interpret standard texts. These people were able to read the Standard English and the Plain English version of the Code of Conduct.

Presentation of Easy Read Materials to the Service Users
Research has shown that the order, in which formats are presented, can have a significant impact on people's views. For example, if Plain English text is shown first, to a user with reading skills, then this may effect the ease with which the users could access each of the remaining formats – it may increase their potential to understand the symbols and pictures that follow. To counter this problem, the researchers randomly generated the order in which each user would be presented with the formats. In total, it is possible to generate 24 different orders from the four formats used in this study (6 combinations for each format). Subsequently, the researchers generated a 50% random list of different orders (12 in total). These are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The Order in Which Each Format was Presented to the Participating Users.
1=Plain English   2=Widgit   3=Change People   4=Inspired Services

User	Order Presented	User	Order Presented	User	Order Presented
1	1,4,3,2	5	4,1,2,3	9	3,4,1,2
2	1,3,2,4	6	3,1,4,2	10	2,4,3,1
3	2,1,3,4	7	3,2,4,1	11	2,3,1,4
4	2,3,4,1	8	4,2,1,3	12	4,3,1,2

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[16] British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS), (Lloyd, Dunn, Whetton and Pintilie, 1982

During the presentation of the 4 formats, the users were asked to read what was in front of them. If the format was Plain English then the participants were asked to read aloud as many words they could identify from the text. When the picture formats were first presented to the users the authors covered the written text to gauge the extent that they could access the pictures and symbols and interpret their intended meanings. Then each client was presented with the pictures and the Plain English text. During the presentations the clients were prompted to give their impressions of the formats in response to open ended questions.[17] These included 'how do you find this format?', or, 'what do you think of the pictures?', or, 'what do you think this says?'. Following the presentation of all the formats, the users were then asked to rank them in order of their most-to-least favoured options. During the sessions the facilitators avoided telling the users what the written content said until after the session.

<u>Cost implications</u>
Cost implications were gathered and placed into a matrix. The two main sources included phone conversations with the organisations associated with the formats used and their websites; and based upon the views of those taking part in the focus groups. The Matrix is presented in Appendix 6.

Section 3: Project Findings
<u>Easy Read User Group</u>
The 12 users ranged from 22 to 66 years of age (mean age=32.5years) with men and women equally represented. Figure 1 shows that the client participants were of mixed reading ability: 5 people with limited reading ability and 3 with little or no reading skills. Four of the participants were competent readers able to read whole sentences often involving long and complex words. These findings suggest that, within the confines of the study, the users represented a cross-section of users with diverse reading abilities.

Figure 1: The Users Ability to Interpret Written Text.
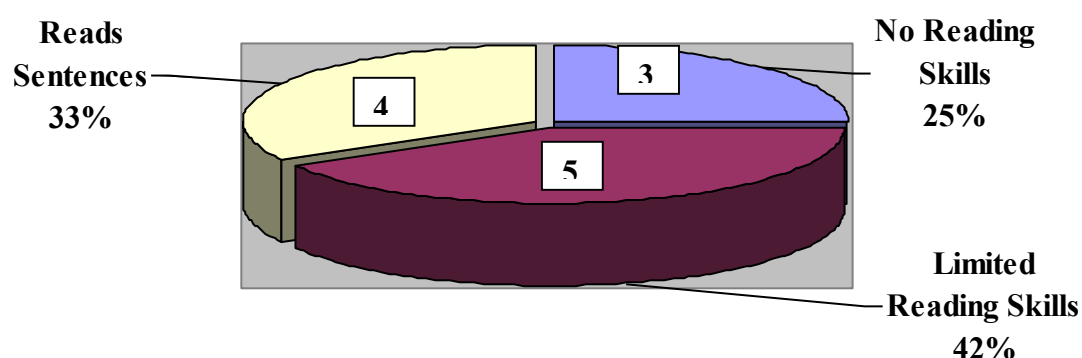
<u>User Interviews/Sessions</u>
Prior to being introduced to the 4 formats the users were asked if they knew what 'easy read' was. Only 1 person said they knew, but they described the approach in

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[17] These are less prone to latency effects and those associated with acquiescence than closed 'yes no' questions. See , for example, Houtkoop-Steenstra, H. & Antaki, C. (1997). Creating happy people by asking yes/no questions. <u>Research on Language and Social Interaction</u>, 30, 285-315. and the primary author's own work Kilsby, M., Bennert,.K. & Beyer, S (2002) Reducing job seeker acquiescence in Vocational Profiling Procedures, <u>Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation</u>, <u>17</u> 4, 287-299.

terms of using only 'simple text'. One person used Makaton as a main means of communication. Figure 2 shows the extent that the users reported understanding the Plain English format. Unsurprisingly there was an almost perfect fit between the users' reported reading abilities on the one hand, and their ability to read the Plain English text on the other. This means that for 4 people the plain English text on its own was sufficient to enable them to understand what was written and that for a further 5 people with limited reading abilities, it was partially accessible. Those 4 readers, also unsurprisingly, reported that the accompanying pictures and symbols contained in the Widgit, Change and Inspired Services formats were of little or no use to them in interpreting the text.

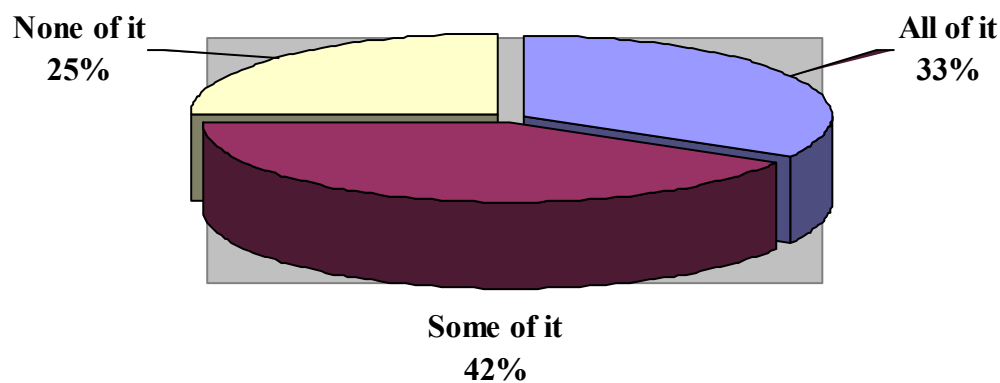**Figure 2: Extent that Users Accesed Plain English**

Figure 3: Comparison of Format Types – Extent that Users with Limited or No Reading Skills Understood Each Format
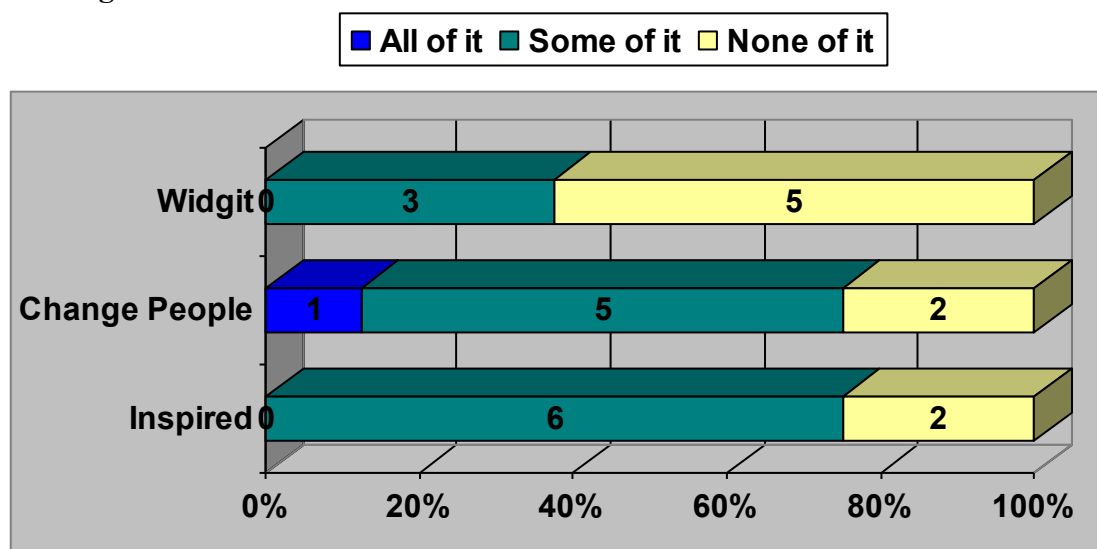

Figure 3 represents the extent that those with limited and no reading skills rated their understanding of the 3 formats with the pictures and symbols. It shows that 3 of the 8 participants understood some of the content through Widgit. Of these 3 individuals, 2 users had no reading skills and could not access any of the accompanying Plain English text. This strongly indicates that for some, the Widgit format enabled them greater access to understanding the ideas conveyed in the text. These users generally picked out certain Widgit symbols, such as 'Union Jack' and 'Disability', reinforcing

findings from the Norah Fry research that universal symbols and signs are beneficial to the user group. Two of these 3 users also identified 'people' and one 'employment'. Although those with no reading skills were able to pick out these words, they were unable to gather enough information to represent the flow and depth of ideas presented in the text.

Interestingly, 4 of the 5 users, reported that they could not interpret any of the ideas relayed through Widgit, had limited reading abilities. Comments made by these individuals suggested that they found Widgit too complicated to interpret and that the combination of Widgit and Plain text relayed too much information and became confusing. One user reported 'Widgit does my head in' another that 'not these pictures again – I don't know what they mean.' This suggests that for some, the more 'symbolic' approach was not only relatively hard to interpret, but detracted from their ability and motivation to interpret any of the accompanying plain English text. This notion is reinforced by the responses of users when asked 'how helpful were the pictures'. Figure 4 shows how those with limited reading or no reading abilities responded to these questions. In relation to Widgit, 6 out of the 8 users rated the pictures as no help whatsoever, and if the 4 individuals with reading skills are added, then this number increases to 10 out of 12 (83%).

Figure 4: How Users rated the Usefulness of the Pictures
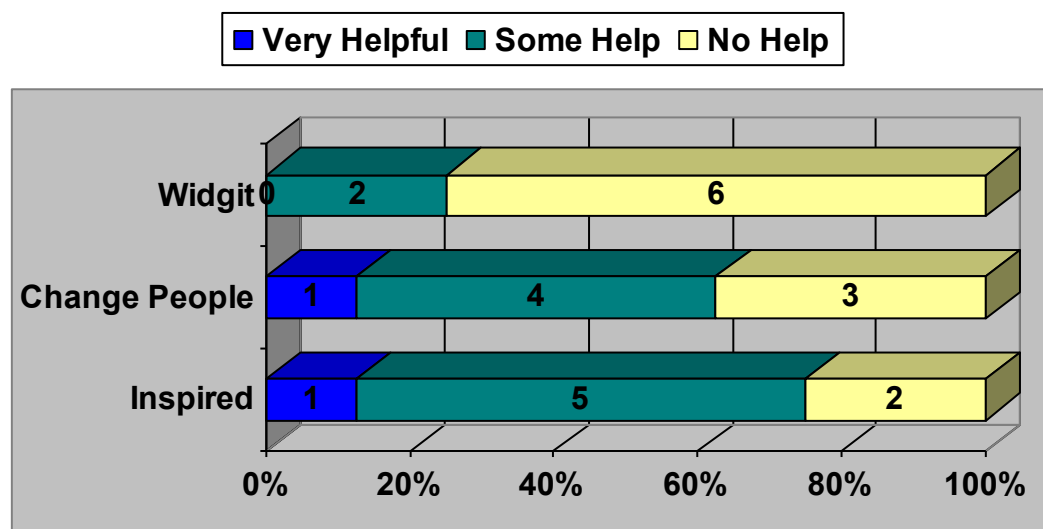
At first glance 'Change People' appears to have faired slightly better than the 'Widgit' approach for these users. Figure 3 shows that for one user, the picture had enabled them to fully understand all the messages relayed in the Plain text. This should be treated with caution and could reflect that for this user the 'Change' format was presented last. This said, it is clear that the broad context covered by the picture-relayed information that those with limited and no reading abilities could access. As with Widgit, 2 of those understanding some of the concepts had no reading skills.

With the Change format some users picked out the disabled sign, others that there was a group being trained, others made an association between the words 'equal opportunities' and the protest theme represented in the picture. None of these users made the association between the handshake and the concept 'respect', reaffirming how difficult it is to represent more abstract concepts through more pictorial means. When asked how helpful the pictures in the change format had been to them, 5 of the

8 users identified this as being very helpful, or, of some help in assisting them to understand the written text. This may reflect the fact that Change had relatively more pictorial content and relied less on more abstract symbol use. As with Widgit, none of the users with limited or no reading skills could interpret all the ideas contained in the text through the pictures alone. This may indicate that for many users, especially those not familiar with the language represented through symbols, pictures representing real events may be more accessible in general.

Figure 3 also shows that the Inspired format had a positive impact on the users' abilities to interpret the information contained in the text. As with 'Change' the users with limited or no reading skills picked out aspects of the text contained in the pictures. However, the Inspired Services pictures enabled greater access to more of the written ideas compared with the other 2 picture formats. This may simply reflect the fact that this approach contained a greater number of contextual pictures compared to 'Change'. Through this format users identified concepts such as 'training' 'disability' 'human rights' and, impressively, 'isolation' in the form of 'lonely', 'on his own' and 'not included'. The fact that the Inspired Services pictures were useful in their broadest sense, is illustrated in the fact that 6 of the 8 respondents reported that the format was either very, or of some, help to them in interpreting the text.

Following each session the users were asked to rank in order their favoured formats. Figure 5 represents the average rank of the scores, excluding the Plain text. It suggests that the 'Inspired Services' format was the most favoured, followed by Change and then Widgit (average ranks=3.5, 2.9 & 2 respectively). Seven users ranked the Inspired Services format as their favourite. This reinforces previous findings suggesting that for these users pictures as opposed to symbols, may be the more accessible format. Interestingly, only 2 of the 4 users with reading skills chose Plain English as their favoured option. Some of the users said they enjoyed those formats with pictures, rather than just plain words, while others said they liked the colours involved in Widgit and Inspired.

Figure 5: Rank Ordering of Preferences

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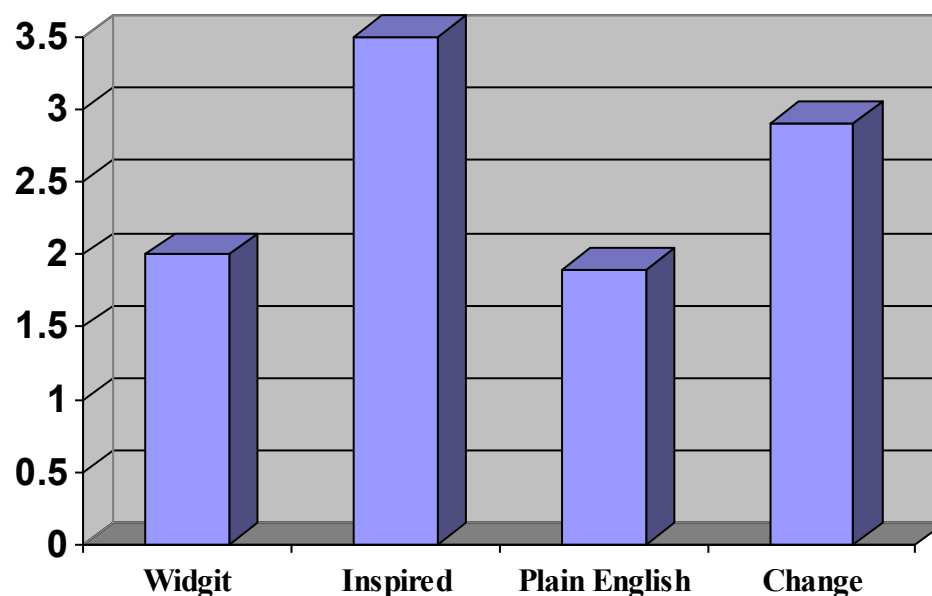
As reported, 2 focus groups were conducted. Group 1 consisting of Shaw Trust staff members and group 2 consisting of other stakeholders including 2 employers. Most of the staff stakeholders reported having some experience of delivering easy read materials to the user, although none had extensive experience at developing easy read materials. In group 2, 4 of those participating reported that they had some knowledge and experience with easy read and the People First Co-ordinator reported having used picture banks and Photo symbols to help people to make public presentations. This had also involved him in developing Plain English texts, although he had not received formal training in this area. One of the employers in group 2 had no knowledge of any easy read approaches. The consultant had previously been involved in research identifying ways of using pictures to overcome problems associated with acquiescence. British Gas had recently won an award for its booklets "Advice for Disabled People".

The groups were first shown the Standard English version of the Code of Conduct and asked to read through it. They were then presented with the Plain English format. All of the stakeholders agreed that the Plain English version was easier to read compared to the standard text and most agreed that this would be more accessible to those with learning disabilities. The representative from British Gas said that he felt that plain text of this nature might be of benefit to *all* his staff, not just for employees with learning disabilities. Some of the participants pointed out that in the Plain English text the sentences were shorter, and also contained less information. This was considered to be an advantage of the approach for people with learning disabilities, who often cannot remember or understand long and complex sentences. The two disadvantages highlighted by the group were that Plain text may still be inaccessible to many people with limited or no reading skills and that there is need to ensure that in keeping the text plain, important information is not omitted.

When asked about the cost implications of the approach the groups identified the requirement to have translated the materials and the fact that staff would need training in Plain text writing and one person felt this could create barriers within the staff group. The Staff group discussed the possibility of outsourcing this task and that this had other cost implications, as the 'translators' would require payment. Some staff reported that many of their staff already undertake these translations themselves, although few have had formal training in the approach.

The groups had mixed feelings about the Widgit format. All were unanimous that Widgit, although a highly evolved symbol system, would require a plain text accompaniment. Some felt that the colours made the text more interesting. Most, who worked with people with learning disabilities, felt that the symbols would be inaccessible to most users and that they would require prior training to access the format. One participant commented that the approach was "almost like a foreign language." Some suggested that the symbols were "too busy" and "confusing", supporting the view that the symbols may contain too much information for many of the client group. As with the Plain text format, the group felt that Widgit would require translation and staff would need to be trained in the approach in order to teach it to the clients. The employer suggested that this was a format that was unusable in

the work place; it would be an unnecessary cost and would be inaccessible to non-disabled and disabled workers alike.

When presented with the final 2 formats the participants suggested that the pictures in these would be more accessible than those of Widgit for people with limited or no reading skills. The Change format had the advantage of being less complicated and some users may prefer the black and white presentation of this approach. One of the disadvantages of this format was that it only covered a very broad theme and was not specific enough or detailed enough to convey many of the ideas captured in the text. Although this was also seen as a problem with the Inspiration format, many felt that this approach contained more accessible information. Some felt that in providing a picture to accompany each sentence was a good idea. Others pointed out that if this was applied to longer texts it might be too time consuming to develop.

Both groups felt that these formats would be more suitable for in-house development, and that what was required was access to a picture bank that included a vast array of pictures covering an array of topics and ideas. Others felt that this would be a "mission impossible" as one would need an infinite variety of pictures for the infinite variety of ideas that needed to be relayed. One person suggested that the best way to develop people's understanding of the pictures would be to involve the clients in their creation. Some argued that this may be the best way to develop an easy read version of the code of conduct, by engaging a client group to select the easy read version that is most accessible and to select or develop pictures that reflect the ideas in the text.

Section 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions are based around findings from the users and professionals who participated in this study. The recommendations are based around developing Shaw Trust's Code of Conduct to incorporate easy read formats that make it more accessible to people with learning disabilities. The findings indicate that there is no single easy read approach that suits the variety and diversity of all the users' needs.

Recommendation 1: That a variety of easy read approaches be adopted to meet the diversity of needs of the users. This to include more than 1 version of SHAW Trust's Code of Conduct

The study showed that for 4 of the participants, Plain English text was sufficient without the need of accompanying pictures, and was partially accessible to a further 5 participants with limited reading skills. Those who could read the Plain English version fluently reported that the pictures were of little or no use in helping them to understand the text.

Recommendation 2: That important written texts, especially those directly concerning the users, be translated into Plain English as a stand alone version (Version 2) . This to include SHAW Trust's Code of Conduct.

The findings also showed that formats that included symbols and pictures increased the accessibility of the written content for these users. Furthermore, that symbols combined with the written text was particularly useful for those with limited reading skills.

Recommendation 3: That a further version (version 3) of important texts is produced that includes pictures and symbols to accompany the written text.

The study suggests that the participant users in this study found pictures more accessible and helpful than the more abstract symbols contained in Widgit. As in the Norah Fry research, the study suggests that the use of 'universal signs' was of great benefit, often being the first pictures that the users identified and interpreted. Some of the users in this study found the Widgit format too 'busy' and of little help in interpreting the text. While this may imply the need for staff and users to become conversant with the approach, it also suggests that other less abstract formats were more accessible for this group. Most of the users preferred the colour formats and they preferred the Change and Inspired Services formats to Widgit.

Recommendation 4: That the nature of the pictures and symbols used to accompany important texts contain colour pictures and avoids using too many abstract symbols.

The study also suggests that some of this user group benefited where pictures were developed to cover the content of each sentence. The extent that this can be achieved will be limited by the size of the document and the extent that there are enough images to cover the range of information contained in the text. Evidence from this study and previous research has identified the benefits of engaging users in developing easy read materials. Where they are actively engaged in choosing pictures, symbols and signs, and/or in constructing in pictures the ideas represented in a text, then they may be better able to understand and recall this information compared to just being presented with a document in an easy read format. In this study the formats were presented to the participants and they had no direct input into their design. This, we believe, limited their potential to be accessible to the users.

Recommendation 5: Expand the easy read focus group to develop a 'translation group' that comprises of a diversity of users.

This group could actively engage in the translation of important documents. Where picture banks do not cover the range of pictures required, then the users should be assisted to creating new ones that match the concepts being relayed through the text. This creates the potential for this group to present this information to their peers and colleagues, increasing their own and other peoples' awareness of the important issues, developing their presentation and advocacy skills and creating a sense of ownership and control over the content for the users and by implication developing in-house expertise in easy read translation.

Recommendation 6: That the Translation Group be empowered to develop an easy read format specific to Shaw Trust's Code of Conduct and be supported to disseminate this information within the organisation.

The study limitations did not allow a satisfactory presentation of auditory approaches. The significance of this is that if a suitable word to voice translation can be identified then this allows any documents written in plain English to be instantly translated into this format. One of the obvious advantages of this approach is that it is highly accessible to those many users who can understand and hear plainly spoken English and once purchased can be used in a number of different locations.

Recommendation 7: That further research is conducted to determine the potential and costs of auditory translation packages for computer generated texts and manuals.

The study represented a small cross section of the user group and stakeholders. Indications are that more in depth research is needed to see the extent that these findings reflect the diversity of the wider user group as a whole. It would be beneficial to examine further the views and opinions of the user group on the formats used in easy read. However, the study has produced some other interesting and worthwhile questions. For example: To what extent are employers familiar with, and receptive to, the various easy read formats? What advantages do easy read approaches hold for employers, and how can this be used to enhance the users' potential to obtain paid jobs in their communities? What are the advantages of investing in in-house expertise in the area of easy read, and how can this potentially link into local employers, schools and colleges and the users' families?
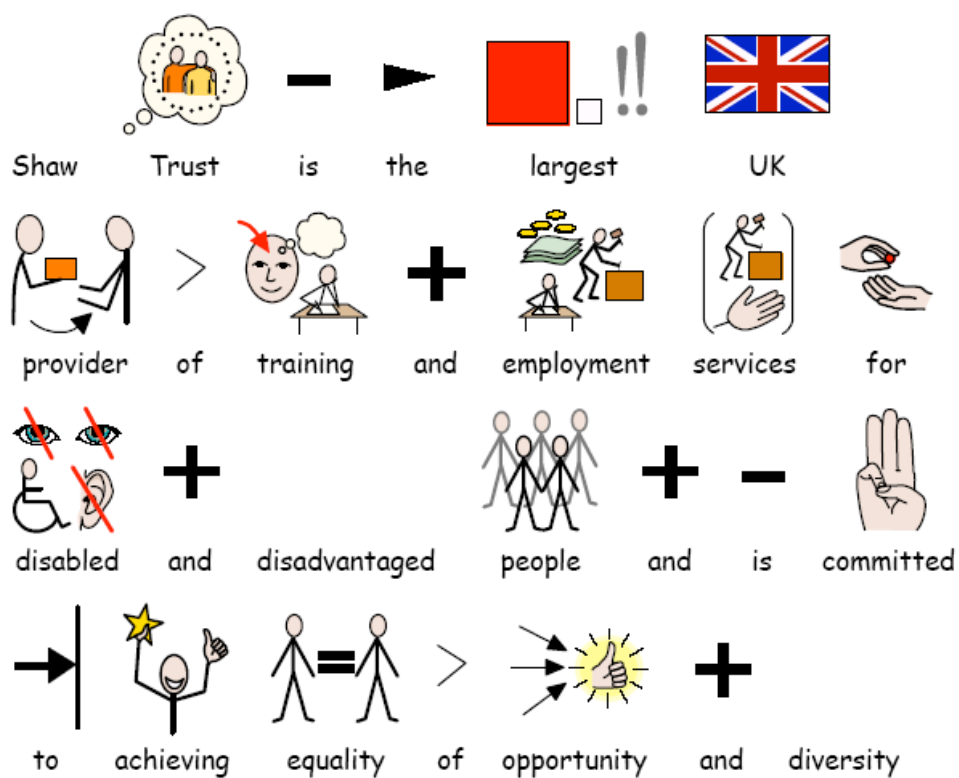
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Appendix 1: Plain English Example

We are Shaw Trust.

Shaw Trust is the biggest group in the UK that gives training to disabled people and other people who do not get good job chances.

We try hard to give equal chances to everyone.

We think everyone should be treated with respect

Appendix 2: Widgit Format

Shaw Trust is the largest UK provider of training and employment services for disabled and disadvantaged people and is committed to achieving equality of opportunity and diversity

Appendix 3: People for Change Format

(Logo)

We are **Shaw Trust.**

Shaw Trust is the biggest group in the UK that gives training to disabled people and other people who do not get good job chances.

We try hard to give equal chances to everyone.

We think everyone should be treated with respect.

Appendix 4: Inspiration Format

Shaw Trust runs training and work services.

We support disabled people and people who are often left out or treated unfairly.

We are the biggest organisation in the country that does this sort of work.

We want people to be given equal chances.

We think it is important to value the differences between people and the ways they live their lives.

Shaw Trust understands and accepts people for who they are.

Appendix 5

Easy Read Permission Form

Shaw Trust Project

- **Shaw Trust asked us to look at the accessibility of easy read formats for people with learning disabilities**

- **Easy Read Focus Groups/Interviews with Users and Staff (one-on-one with users)**

- **Questions are:**
    - o **What are the different formats available?**
    - o **How accessible is each format and to who?**
    - o **What are the costs – human resource and monetary?**

- **Produce a report of the findings to Shaw trust and dissemination to the Equality and Diversity Group**

The data protection act 1984 protects your right to privacy. As part of the work and research being undertaken for this project we may wish to use images of you on displays, in leaflets and publicity items. The project may also receive publicity from radio and TV

I understand that all personal information I provide will be confidential, but I give permission that general information I provide can be used in the evaluation, write up and publicity of the project.

I also understand that press releases may also be used containing this general information.

Name of person

Signature

Date