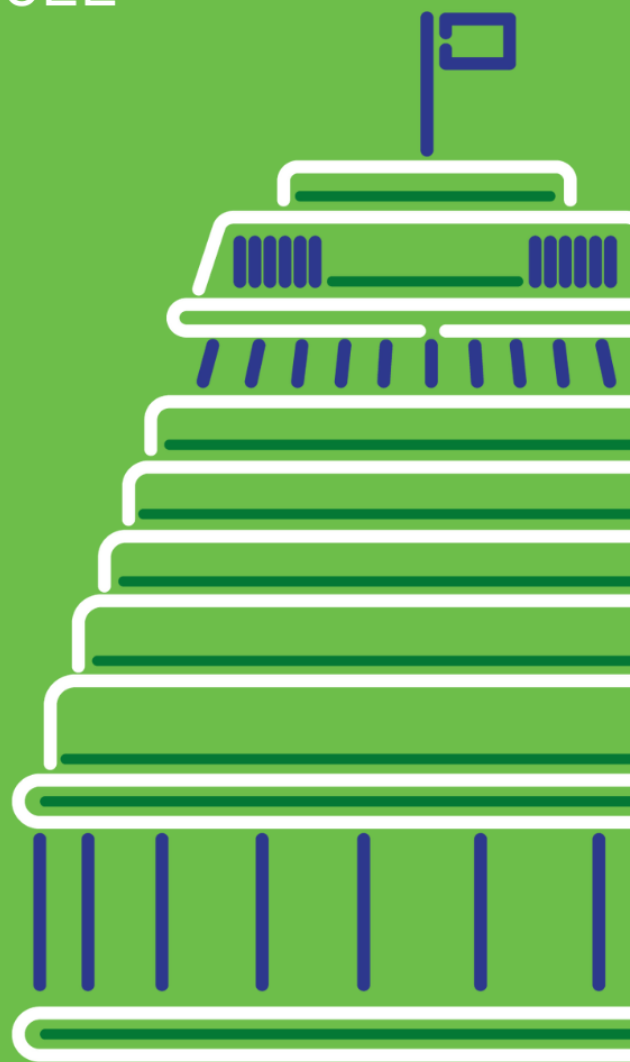


One year on

A snapshot of how well New Zealand's public sector has embraced the intent of the Plain Language Act 2022



We're a year on from the Act coming into effect. This report gives our findings from a review of public sector commitment to the intent of **New Zealand's Plain Language Act 2022.**

Part 1 is a snapshot of how well New Zealand's public sector has embraced some of the requirements and intent of the Plain Language Act.

Part 2 (not included here) is specific and confidential to each agency included in our review. Part 2 is a brief assessment of how well an agency is complying with aspects of the Plain Language Act.

Part 1 — how well the public sector has embraced the Act

It's no secret that Write was delighted to see a Plain Language Act for New Zealand. A year on, we were keen to see if the Act had made a difference. Have agencies embraced its intent? Has clear, effective, and human-centric communication become the norm across the public sector?

We decided to investigate! We chose 29 public service agencies and Crown agents, and kept the scope of our review simple by focusing on just two criteria.

1. The agency has a process for receiving feedback about writing quality from the public, as required by the Act. We looked for:
 - an easily findable process for giving feedback
 - whether the process was clearly worded and easy to follow.
2. The agency showed a commitment to plain language, as implied by the intent and spirit of the Act. We looked for commitment in two ways:
 - a statement that indicates commitment to the Act or to the concept of 'plain language'
 - evidence of plain language being used on a randomly selected webpage.

These criteria are expressly supported by points 2, 3, and 4 of the Guidance on the Plain Language Act issued by the Public Service Commission.

[Read the Public Service Commission's guidance to comply with the Act](#)

Why these criteria?

We looked for a feedback process because:

- it's one of the most straightforward requirements of the Act — in our view, agencies won't encounter any significant barriers to fulfilling this requirement and they'll be able to easily comply with it
- having an easily accessible feedback process signals to the public that they can expect plain language. It also reminds agency staff that they are accountable to the public for communicating clearly.

We looked for a clear commitment to plain language because:

- for users, seeing a stated commitment to plain language, and experiencing plain language, indicates that the agency is embracing the spirit and intent of the Act
- organisations that visibly commit to plain language are more likely to understand how plain language can underpin their success in achieving government priorities. They're also more likely to support their Plain Language Officer.

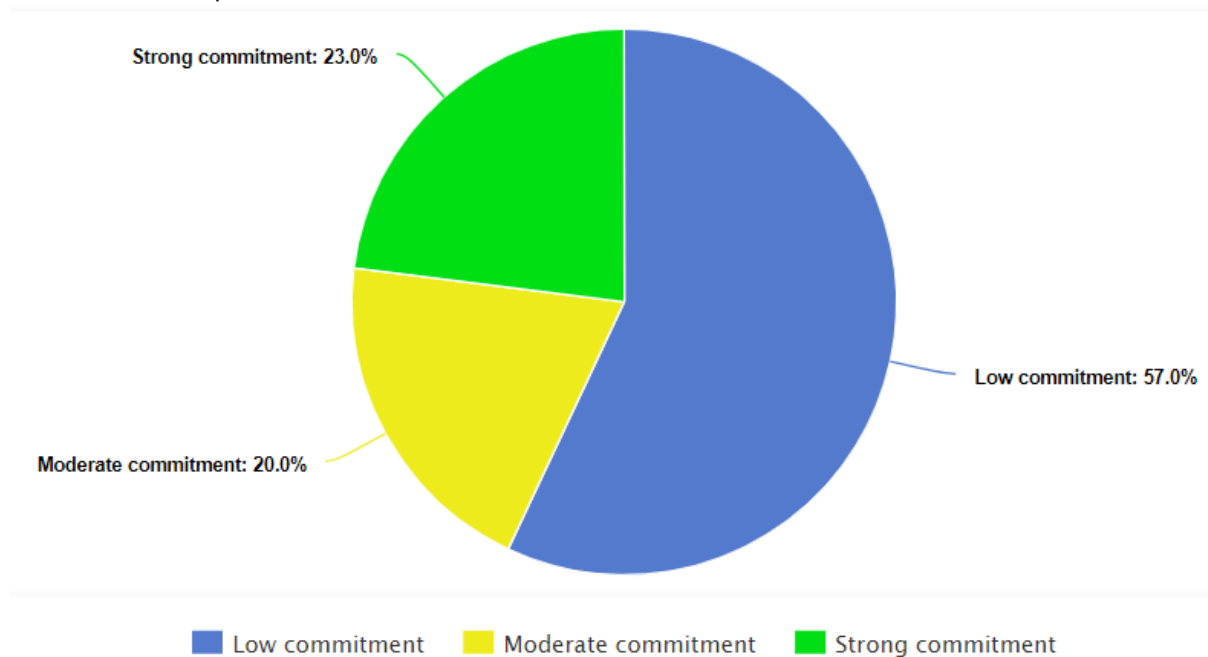
What we found overall

We found many encouraging examples of agencies that comply with and embrace the spirit of the Act. Overall, we found that:

- over 50% of agencies showed ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ writing quality on the webpage we reviewed
- 40% of agencies have a clear process for receiving feedback about their communication
- 30% of agencies clearly state a commitment to plain language.

We combined all data to produce the following view of plain language across the public sector.

A view of various agencies commitment to using plain language across the New Zealand public sector



Results for a specific agency

Part 2 of this report (not included here) is specific and confidential to each agency included in our review. Part 2 scored each agency as having a **low/moderate/strong** commitment to plain language.

In coming to our conclusions, we relied on statements on agency’s websites and our many years of experience in assessing all types of written content against internationally agreed best-practice principles of clear writing.

Still room to improve?

Given that over half of agencies in our study showed a low commitment to plain language, the answer is clearly yes.

But this report focuses on the positives, and gives some suggestions for those who have the resources to do more.

Circumstances have not been ideal

We know that circumstances across the public sector in 2023 and 2024 have not been ideal for implementing organisation-wide change. Budgets have been tight, and severe cost-cutting measures and reductions in staff numbers over the past months have made things even harder.

Happily though, we know from our many interactions with Plain Language Officers and government communications teams that agencies still have a strong desire to fulfil the intent of the Act.

Let us help where we can

We want to emphasise how much great work is going on to create clear, accessible, and effective communication across the public sector. We see it every day — but we know more can be done.

Talk to us if you're not sure what to do next. We can direct you to some great free resources or suggest other ways to help you get more value from the time your people spend writing.

Write's free resources

See the Write Plain Language Standard later in this report. If you'd like to customise the Standard for your own use under a free Creative Commons licence, please download a copy from the Write website and follow the guidance for attribution.

[Download the Write Plain Language Standard](#)

Visit our website for other free resources to help you in your plain language journey.

[Find jargon busters, checklists, guides, and videos](#)

Read useful articles on our blog and website that give you practical tips for embedding plain language in your organisation.

[Read our blog 'Five ways to make plain language work in your organisation'](#)

[Visit our website and find out how you can meet the Plain Language Act](#)

[Get a copy of Rewrite](#) — the practical handbook on how to adopt a plain language writing style across your organisation, including a framework for culture change and New Zealand success stories.

Keep up the great work!



Lynda Harris
Chief Executive

The Write Plain Language Standard

To apply the Standard to any document, first:

- list your reader(s) and describe their context and questions

- write the intended or ideal outcomes for this document

Then mark 'Yes' or 'Needs work' against the 10 statements below.

'Big Picture' elements

- | | Yes | Needs work |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. The purpose of the document is clear at the start _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. The content supports the purpose of the document _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. The structure of the document is clear and logical to the reader _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. The headings signal the key content _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Language elements

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 5. The paragraphs are mostly short and focused on one topic _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. The sentences are mostly short and straightforward _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. The words are precise and familiar _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. The tone supports the purpose of the document _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Presentation elements

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 9. The layout and presentation help the reader absorb the message quickly and easily _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. The document is error-free and consistent with your style guide _____ | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

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