



**The 2009 Lexicon**

**A guide to contemporary Newspeak**

**Preface by Bill Jamieson**

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

This edition of the Lexicon is shamelessly dependent on the unacknowledged work of numerous contributors. We are most grateful to all those who have written in with examples of how our political masters abuse our language, and to those we have plagiarised.

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## PREFACE

Why is it that jargon and resort to ‘buzzwords’ so offends us?

There is the blighting of a wonderful language that riles. There is the challenge to comprehension, the obscuring or blurring of meaning, the cluttering of clear thought by a language of frosted glass.

But what we see is not just poor use of language. It is the inflation of words and terms. It is particularly evident in the grandiosity of title and function that is now rife across public administration in the UK.

What more deeply concerns us is the resort to language that shuts out those other than a favoured inner circle of users. It excludes as it confuses. Here is the *lingua franca* of central and local government, intent on missions and purposes over which it has primary access – and the last encoded buzzword. Here is the

means by which the empires of public administration extend their remit, their resources and their power.

We use – or certainly ought to use – language to think and communicate with clarity. We are blessed with a rich and beautiful language to help us in this. So why do governments and large companies need to resort to language and expressions that weaken and corrode that clarity?

Might it be that doing so hides a confusion and ambiguity of purpose at the heart? When we look at the underlying reality behind the words, do we feel relief that our simple lack of understanding has got in the way of a purpose and activity that is admirable and benign? Or do we not more often find that our suspicions over confusion of purpose, ambiguity of goals and linguistic deception are too frequently borne out?

That is why campaigns against jargon are driven by more than concern over the beauty of clear language, noble though this is as a cause. It is also to do with good government in the broadest sense – that is, both in public administration and in the corporate world. We wish for government that is clear in its explanations and its actions. For without that clarity we are subject to the confused, the muddled, the mediocre – and the Machiavellian.

### **Sustainability: a case study in abuse**

Few words have become more heavily used or abused in government and corporate affairs than 'sustainable'. It now occupies a lofty position in the towering hierarchy of buzzwords. It is commonplace today to stick the word 'sustainable' in front of almost anything, to talk of 'sustainable development', 'sustainable transport', 'sustainable housing', 'sustainable communities' and so on. Indeed, like the word 'social' slotted in before such words as 'justice', 'housing' and 'enterprise' its very ubiquity has robbed it of meaning, while corrupting the principle or activity to which it is attached,

A quick search on the internet reveals no less than 23 definitions of 'sustainable'. They range from the pithy ('meeting present needs without preventing future generations from meeting their needs'), through the leaden ('the condition of being able to meet the needs of present generations without compromising those needs for future generations. Achieving a balance among extraction and renewal and environmental inputs and outputs, without further burdening the environment') to the tautological ('capable of being sustained').

'Sustainable' is a word whose very looseness and lack of clarity makes it a perfect prefix for any activity where approval is being sought. It

conjures up a lost romanticism, an idyllic picture of a pre-industrial economy in which communities enjoy pastoral pursuits with none of the intrusions of modern life.

'Sustainable development' is frequently used by local authorities to win favour for a block of 'affordable homes' or a new office block to which opposition is anticipated. Such promotion will typically stress the use of 'natural woods' from 'sustainable forests' or how the proposed buildings have been equipped with machinery to 'recycle waste'. But does 'sustainable' mean that the development will necessarily outlive the buildings it is replacing, or is it invoked to describe some other characteristic?

Here we come to the first of many ambiguities about the word 'sustainable'. Do we really mean sustainable by duration, or materials used, or end product or the means of its creation?

Sustainability by duration runs into obvious difficulties. No one can tell whether a building or business is 'sustainable' over a period of time. Much entrepreneurial activity is by its nature a process of discovery, not certainty as to length of existence.

What determines longevity is not always or even mostly the durability of this end product but social and cultural attitudes and individual

preferences. We build modern blocks of flats – and then blow them up because of unintended or unforeseen consequences of planning or because social preferences have changed. We build cars and then exchange them, or sell them long before their utility value has been exhausted, because we prefer fuel efficiencies or improvements of more recent models.

Does the user of the word mean sustainable by reference to activity or products or materials used? Wood is a favoured 'sustainable' material. But a similar argument can be made for stone or aggregates, converted into cement, that can endure long after wood has rotted. It can also avoid over-use of wood and the forests from which the wood comes, while being itself capable of recycling into aggregate for other uses. Yet we seldom read or hear about 'sustainable cement'.

Technology and innovation also continually recast and reshape what we consider to be 'sustainable'. Yesterday's sustainable development can be tomorrow's obsolescence.

'Sustainable communities' is a term particularly popular with the present government. It is almost on a par with 'hard working families' as if there was any other sort. Indeed, perhaps the two might merge into 'hard working sustainable communities' to achieve a Triple Score in

Buzzword Bingo. 'Sustainable communities' is a tautology: if a community exists it is clearly in the process of sustaining itself; if it is not, it is not a community, or the members of it have gone off to form other communities.

Communities have always expanded, contracted, merged or divided or given way to new 'communities'. This dynamic process of change and development is arguably as worthy of support as working for 'sustainable communities'. Government action to 'sustain' a 'community' may work to inhibit or impede the natural formation of other communities, formed by voluntary action. The term 'sustainable community' often belies a confusion or lack of clarity as to what actually the government wishes to sustain, and why.

Zero carbon homes are often cited at the 'perfection' end of the sustainability spectrum. Surely nothing can be more worthy of the description 'sustainable' than the zero carbon home. Gordon Brown as chancellor portentously launched a great promotion of zero carbon homes to feature in a new range of eco towns. But two problems arose. One was that people in the areas chosen for eco towns became suspicious that the development was more new town than 'eco'. Another was that zero carbon homes proved so expensive there was little

demand for them. According to one recent report, the total sold so far amounts to six. A 'sustainable housing' programme based on the sale of just six homes cannot fairly be described as... well, sustainable.

We hear much about 'sustainable economic growth'. There is barely a government or local authority enterprise agency that does not worship at the altar of sustainable growth. The Scottish Government, for example, has as its 'number one' priority a policy of promoting sustainable economic growth. But what does it mean? All economies, other than the most centrally planned, are subject to cycles. Few economies have managed to achieve 'sustainable growth'. Much of the attractive-looking 'dynamic' performance seen in the economies of Asia Pacific, Latin America and Eastern Europe reflected developmental catch-up rather than a linear, 'sustained' rate of economic growth that will last indefinitely.

There is an additional danger with 'sustainable economic growth'. It creates a further hurdle of proof for the activities of the enterprise sector. By doing so it may introduce an inhibition or discouragement of entrepreneurial activity because its future benefits cannot be measurable or ascertained. As a result, policies aimed at achieving sustainability can result in

suppression of economic activity and a lower rate of growth than would otherwise be achieved.

But if the definition of 'sustainable development' is in itself imprecise, how much more difficult, surely, is the implementation and safeguarding of a particular targeted 'growth rate'? Such targeted growth can only be achieved by centrally planned and tightly controlled economies, and even then can come to depend on continual statistical manipulation to show the desired 'sustainable' result.

There are many elements associated with 'sustainable development': fuel efficiency, 'natural' materials, ergonomic design, wind turbines, solar power, self supporting systems, recycled waste, locally sourced products are a few. These may each be eminently desirable both as means to an end and as ends in themselves. Do they die with a more judicious use of the word 'sustainable'? Of course not.

The objection here is not to the underlying constituents of what we mean by 'sustainable' but to the use of 'sustainable' as a vacuous buzzword thrown as an algae-covered bone to the Green lobby to drape an aura of public good around economic change. Hence the need to disguise and drape the new as old, to present risk as certainty, experiment as surety, and an unknowable future as 'sustainable'.

### **Examples of Sustainable Development jargon**

The following quotation comes from a Scottish Government document entitled *Modernising the Planning System*. It is published by Malcolm Chisholm, former Minister for Communities:

#### *06: Sustainable Development*

*The introduction of a new framework and hierarchy for planning, along with measures to improve efficiency and support better inclusion, are not an end in themselves. They are, instead, a means to securing better outcomes from the planning process. The proposals in the White Paper increase the opportunities for planning to fulfil its potential and to play its role in delivering sustainable development. For development to be sustainable it must be the right development, in the right place, of the right quality and at the right time...*

*Development planning provides both a framework and a process by which the interaction of economic, social and environmental considerations as they affect people and places can be identified and evaluated.*

Such explanations of official policy only beg more questions in the reader's mind. Here for example are three:

- What exactly is a 'planning hierarchy'?

- What is the right development for sustainable development?
- How can development planning be both a framework and a process?

A subsequent document on planning reform contained this paragraph in reference to the proposed National Planning Framework (NPF):

*The NPF identifies connectivity and environmental quality as crucial factors in achieving the Executive's objective of sustainable long-term economic growth. It reflects the commitment to supporting the development of Scotland's cities as the main drivers of the economy and identifies priorities and opportunities for different parts of the country in spatial perspectives for the Central Belt, East Coast, Ayrshire and the South-West and Rural Scotland.*

Here the questions raised include:

- What does is this paragraph mean?
- What is meant by the phrase 'spatial perspectives'? Are there any perspectives that are non spatial? Or space that does not have a 'perspective'?
- How do you think a priority can be identified in a spatial perspective? Discuss.

### **The corruption of the corporate sector**

The new religion of environmentalism is begetting a jargon all of its own. This is by no means confined to the public sector. It is now rife in company brochures and annual reports. Often the goals are laudable, but taken to extremes they can elicit public cynicism, if not exasperation, over a misplaced and misguided striving for effect. Is the declared environmental 'good behaviour' being proclaimed really as environment-saving as is claimed? Or is the organisation merely striving for effect? Take, for example, this, from a promotional leaflet from insurance group Aegon:

*This has been produced using vegetable-based inks with 'alcohol free' fount solution and is printed on 200 gsm 9lives 80 silk. 80% recycled. NAPM approved paper. 20% virgin fibre sourced from sustainable forests and is Totally Chlorine Free (TCF).*

Are we any the wiser? Did anyone ever ask what the environmental benefit would be if the leaflet had not been produced in the first place?

Companies now devote large sections of their ever-expanding annual reports to voluminous jargon-ridden environmental reports and updates with impressive sounding statistics and targets. Annual reports ballooned to a colossal size as the credit crisis approached. But now shareholders and even 'stake-holders' may be thinking that

perhaps it would have been better if more effort had been put into ensuring a business model that worked than that the canteen coffee cups were made from fibres from sustainable forests.

Perhaps one virtuous effect of the credit crunch will be to bring about a slimming down of these huge reports. For example, here is a section from the annual report of the Royal Bank of Scotland which had to be recapitalized in 2008 following huge provisions in its loan book and a collapse in its share price.

*Our footprint*

*Financial services is an industry with a low carbon footprint and RBS has one of the lowest among UK banks. We are committed to reducing further the carbon intensity of our operations and the initiatives we have taken should reduce our carbon dioxide emissions by as much as one-fifth by 2011. We will achieve that in a number of ways. Since October 2007, all of our electricity in the UK and Ireland has come from renewable sources. Phase one of our £55 million property investment programme is nearing completion and will cut our annual carbon dioxide emissions by 97,000 tonnes... Last year the Group recycled 21,000 tonnes of paper and the introduction of e-statements in November will reduce significantly the 15 million statements we send through the post each month.*

Arguably more revealing is the large section on environmental target-hitting set out in the last published Report and Accounts of Northern Rock before the company collapsed and had to be taken into public ownership:

*Waste – Northern Rock follows the principles of 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle'. We have improved operational procedures and enhanced IT systems to minimise paper waste... There are also recycling schemes in place in Head Office sites for plastic bottles, plastic cups, aluminium cans, waxed paper cups, toner cartridges, computer consumables, glass and mobile phone batteries. In advance of the Implementation of the EU Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (the WEEE Directive) a secure licensed disposal contract has been established with a national contractor. Our recycling rate for waste is 61% and our total waste output has remained the same as last year...*

Is all this credible? It is perhaps no less credible than this statement elsewhere in the report: "The low risk nature of Northern Rock's balance sheet is reflected in the mix of assets, with 77% of total assets represented by secured residential mortgages."

Another example of how obsessive environmentalism may have taken management

eye off the ball is Bradford & Bingley plc. The following is taken from the 2007 annual report and the 26 page section on Corporate Social Responsibility (considerably longer than the section given to risk management):

*We have installed the Enviro-Fresh Sani-Sleeve system in our head office buildings in Bingley and Crossflatts. This is a water saving toilet flushing system that also eliminates the need for chemical cleaners. A timed solenoid valve reduces the need for constant flushing in urinals whilst 'good' bacteria and enzymes in the Sani-Sleeve deal with the cause of smells and blockage. The elements of the system are either recyclable or fully biodegradable...*

*In addition, we are working on composting some of our waste that is not recycled. All our sandwich packaging in our onsite restaurants is now made from biodegradable packaging and all cleaning products on our central Head Office sites are biodegradable.*

Not to be left behind in the rush to meet environmental targets while the business buckled was HBOS. This comes from the 2007 Annual Report, published before the shares collapsed and the group had to be recapitalised and taken over by Lloyds TSB:

*Our flagship south west headquarters, Bristol Harbourside, was completed at the end of 2007. Built from sustainable materials and kitted out with cutting edge energy efficiency technology, the building received the highest possible building rating, 'Excellent', in the Building Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method ('BREEAM') environmental rating..*

These quotations barely do justice to the lengthy sections now devoted in annual reports to the box-ticking minutiae of environmentalism and corporate responsibility. At the same time, coverage of internal auditing and business risk appraisal is given far less coverage.

A simple question is enough to conclude these thoughts: would you, as a customer (and now of course a shareholder) of a bank prefer it to be concentrating on the quality of its loan book or on producing more jargonboogle?

Bill Jamieson  
December 2008

*Bill Jamieson is Executive Editor of The Scotsman.*

## A

**Address** (the real issue): avoid (the real issue).

**Alarmist**: what one must not be (cf complacent).

**Ambitious**: the setting of unachievable targets (qv). “What we need to do, both as a country and as the EU is set an example, in terms of setting out an ambitious target. This is because we need to show not just the US but also India and China in particular, that we are serious about climate change as a whole and therefore that’s why we do support the setting out by the EU of ambitious targets, as long as the ambitious target takes into account the individual circumstances in each country.” Prime Minister’s Spokesman, DowningStreetSays.com, 2 March 2007.

**Anti-social behaviour**: anything of which the Government does not approve.

**Arm’s length**: the right to appoint board members

**Aspiration**: a pledge (qv) the speaker knows that he is not in a position to make (“To extend home ownership to another million people in the next five years and take the UK towards the Government’s aspiration of 75 per cent home

## THE 2009 LEXICON

ownership, Britain must... put in place long-term reforms..." Gordon Brown, *Government Response to Kate Barker's Review of Housing Supply*, December 2005.

**Assets:** liabilities.

**Awareness** (need to raise): announcement in place of action. "There is also a pressing need to raise awareness of the work that has already been done on redesigning care pathways so PCTs don't reinvent the wheel." Patricia Hewitt, speech to the NHS Alliance Spring Conference, 17 May 2007.

## B

**Bandwagon:** something a political opponent is jumping on when he is closely in tune with public opinion.

**Beacon:** example. "We cannot be a beacon to the world unless the talents of all the people shine through." Tony Blair, Speech to the Labour Party Conference, 30 September 1997.

**Benchmark:** clipboard activity suggesting that measuring a problem is the same as doing something about it. Gives illusion of purposeful action. "A diversity of approach allows us to

## THE 2009 LEXICON

spread risks, to test out different ways of working, and to benchmark best practice.” David Miliband, *Perspectives on European Integration - A British View*, 2002.

**Best practice:** procedure determined by a committee of consultants; ignorance of precedent. “It is about spreading good practice. We have seen some examples of fine practice but we need a lot more and I think that we need someone at the top – a Communication Champion – who is ready to raise awareness, to chase progress at the local level, to encourage best practice and indeed to run, as we recommend, a National Year of Speech, Language and Communication, the effect of which should be to raise the profile and salience of the issue that much further.” John Bercow, Today Programme, 8 July 2008.

**Best value:** expensive. “In 2003, we changed the guidance on best value, to enable local authorities to dispose of assets at a discount of up to £2 million, thus enabling some assets to be effectively gifted to the third sector.” David Miliband, Speech to the NCVO Annual Conference, 2006.

**Blue skies thinking:** uncosted ideas for further government activity.

## THE 2009 LEXICON

**Britishness:** any combination of values which a politician wants to promote. Usually displaces long-standing institutions such as the monarchy, the Armed Forces, the great public institutions. “And these values are not merely abstract. They are embodied in our national institutions; not merely those to which Churchill assigned a ‘long continuity’ but to new ones that encapsulate what we like best about Britain – like the NHS; fairness and decency in institutional form. It is why under this government new institutions like Surestart Centres say something about what we value as a society.” Ruth Kelly and Liam Byrne, *A Common Place*, Fabian Society, June 2004.

**Broaden:** destroy. “We are looking to broaden the specialist roles of the library staff so that they can deliver the Government’s agenda to modernise libraries, improve access to materials and make the library service more attractive to a wider audience.” Labour councillor, Bristol, February 2002.

**Business:** government organisation or agency. “There’s a very clear management structure [within the Border and Immigration Agency]... The business knows how it runs... Some of the changes that have been made, requiring the business to be more efficient...” Lin Homer, Chief Executive of the Border and Immigration Agency, *Today* programme, 7 January 2008.

## C

**Capacity building:** activities designed to increase the staff, budget and remit of government departments and quangos. “And by investing in all of those who work with children, and by building capacity to work across professional boundaries we can ensure that joining up services is not just about providing a safety net for the vulnerable.” Ed Balls, *The Children’s Plan*, DCSF, 2007.

**Care:** regulated behaviour. “In summary this Act establishes a new, independent regulatory body for social care and private and voluntary healthcare services (“care services”) in England to be known as the National Care Standards Commission...” Care Standards Act 2000.

**Celebrate** (as in celebrate diversity): compulsory approbation. “London’s choice is clear. We celebrate diversity. We aim to give every community its fair stake in our city’s politics, prosperity and culture. We want every community fully represented in our police service, teaching profession, boardrooms and politics.” Ken Livingstone, “Multi-culturalism works for London”, 25 January 2006.

**Celebrate** (as in to celebrate achievements): to use taxpayers’ money to promote the

## THE 2009 LEXICON

Government. “There is much to celebrate about our schools – improving results, good teaching and committed staff... It is right to reward the staff whose work helps pupils to learn and these awards celebrate their achievements.” David Miliband, on announcement of awards of between £5,700 and £25,700 to 7,000 primary and secondary schools, 7 May 2003.

**Channel management:** closing call centres, forcing people to contact a government agency online. “Better channel management and greater use of web-delivered services may be councils’ best response to CSR07 pressures”, Society of Information Technology Managers Press Release, August 2007.

**Citizenship:** universal (qv) inculcation of government values. “The DfES has re-launched citizenship education with a sharper focus on participation in society, volunteering and community engagement.” Ruth Kelly and Liam Byrne, *A Common Place*, Fabian Society, June 2004.

**Civil Renewal:** government initiative to increase citizens’ participation in their local community and “enhance democratic engagement”. Often instigated by central government departments and quangos, by-passing local authorities. “NCVO also argues that civil renewal (horizontal

## THE 2009 LEXICON

participation) may be a prior condition of civic renewal (vertical participation).” NCVO, Researching the Voluntary Sector Conference, 9-10 September 2008.

**Civil Renewal Unit:** Government unit in the Home Office dedicated to supporting Civil Renewal initiatives (see above).

**Closure:** evade responsibility (qv move on, draw a line under).

**Collaboration:** term used to disguise murderous in-fighting and tribalism. As in “Glasgow-Edinburgh collaboration.”

**Community group:** a special interest group, or a group of people a politician wants to flatter or appease. Participation in community not relevant, thus does not apply to Royal British Legion, working men’s clubs, Rotary clubs etc.

**Community Empowerment Fund:** money to help promotion of political and ethnic action groups.

**Community Empowerment Network:** groups of ethnic and political action groups in the 88 Neighbourhood Renewal Units set up to feed into the Local Strategic Partnership.

## THE 2009 LEXICON

**Community Interest Company:** company structure proposed by the government under which assets would be protected in the same way as a charity, but without the red tape of charity registration spawned by the same government.

**Community Learning Chest:** fund to give grants of up to £5,000 to help individuals and groups in “accessing learning” to enable involvement in regeneration activities (only available in the NRU’s 88 most deprived areas). Name thought to be derived from the board game Monopoly.

**Community strategy:** plan that every local authority must draw up to improve quality of life for local people. These are intended to be the result of consultation with citizens, businesses and local voluntary groups, ethnic minorities, lobbies and faith groups. “In East Sussex the County Council, all of the partners on the East Sussex Strategic Partnership, including each of the District and Borough Councils and their LSPs, are committed to the process of developing a sustainable community strategy that will address the social, economic and environmental issues within East Sussex.” Letter from Jeremy Leggett, Chairman of East Sussex Strategic Partnership to Hazel Blears, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, 30 November 2007.

## THE 2009 LEXICON

**Community leader:** a self-appointed or government-appointed leader of a community group.

**Compact:** partnership (qv). “Our proposals for a stronger and simpler ‘Compact Plus’ will cut red tape, level the playing field between the voluntary and community sector and public sector bodies, and further unlock the potential of voluntary and community groups for good.” Charles Clarke, relaunching the Government’s Compact with voluntary organisations, 22 March 2005.

**Complacent:** what you must not be (cf alarmist).

**Consensus:** the Government’s view. “Our shared task is to build a British progressive consensus.” Gordon Brown, speech to Compass Conference, 30 October 2004.

**Conservatism** (forces of): anyone the speaker disagrees with.

**Consultant:** private sector worker with leather-bound notebook paid large fees to disguise government failure and/or tell politicians what they already know.

**Consultation** (always wide-ranging): invitation from Government to comments on policy proposals before embarking on their original

## THE 2009 LEXICON

plan. "Take part in a wide range of consultations and have your say on the policy making process." DirectGov website

**Context** (taken out of): inconvenient.

**Controlled drinking:** NHS treatment programmes for chronic and acute alcoholics.

**Conversation** (call for a public): a suggestion used to conceal the fact that a politician has no policy (qv debate).

**Core:** diverse. "The Common Core reflects a set of common values [qv] for practitioners that promote equality, respect diversity and challenge stereotypes, helping to improve the life chances of all children and young people and to provide more effective and integrated services." *Every Child Matters*, DfES, 2005.

**Cost-benefit analysis** (often rigorous): back-of-the-envelope calculation to prove original hypothesis. "We commissioned a cost-benefit analysis from Ove Arup before deciding to endorse the decision to bid to host the games in London in 2012." Tessa Jowell, House of Commons", 2 February 2004.

**Crackdown** (announcement of): not to be confused with the much rarer, crackdown,

## THE 2009 LEXICON

implementation of. "Gordon Brown promised to get more police on the streets and to crack down on illegal sales of alcohol to under-18s." BBC News Online, 23 August 2007.

**Credit crunch:** ready made excuse for any over-run on any budget, any delay in payment or additional £100 billion of additional borrowing required by Government.

**Cultural shift:** something that the Government has failed to achieve: "At yesterday's seminar, attended by Jacqui Smith, the Home Secretary, and James Purnell, the Culture Secretary, the Prime Minister called for a 'cultural shift' to combat under-age drinking and binge-drinking." *Daily Telegraph*, 22 November 2007.

**Customer:** someone who has no choice over the public service he or she is obliged to use.

**Czar:** the well-paid head of a quango appointed to demonstrate activity in dealing with a problem (not to be confused with solving a problem).

## D

**Debate** (call for a): used to imply that talking about a problem is the same as solving a problem (qv

## THE 2009 LEXICON

conversation). Interviewer: “Making it illegal to pay for sex – that is a huge undertaking. Is that seriously what you are thinking this Government could do?” Harriet Harman: “Well, I think we do need to have a debate about it... We have to have a very big debate about this...” Today Programme, 20 December 2007.

**Deliver, delivery:** the process of implementing policy (not the consequence of policy).

**Demographics:** overpopulation, overcrowding.

**Dialogue** (meaningful): the pretence of genuine two-way communication.

**Dignify:** refuse to answer. Question: “He said that employers still have a duty in law to check their employees’ right to work. What would he expect prosecuting authorities to do in the event of an employer claiming that he was just too busy to make those checks? Peter Hain: “Again, I am not going to dignify that question with a response.” House of Commons, 16 January 2008.

**Direction of travel:** the illusion of improvement. “The December 2004 consultation specifically proposed a more structured way for the Commission to report progress of improvement by adding a ‘direction of travel’ label to the

## THE 2009 LEXICON

overall CPA category.” *Local Government Consultation*, Audit Commission, June 2005.

**Discredited** (of a policy): another political party thought of it first.

**Draw a line under** (time to): to get away with, evade responsibility (qv closure).

**Due diligence**: used to suggest thoroughness where there is none.

## E

**Elevation to the House of Lords**: MP vacating his seat for a party apparatchik.

**Empowerment**: process of enabling citizens to take responsibility for themselves and to make decisions about their lives. Usually promoted by government or local authority organisation to ensure that citizens do what the Government wants. “To empower citizens the key is helping them in their daily lives through information and incentives, but also by making local, national and global institutions more accountable, transparent and responsive.” David Miliband, speech at the National School of Governance conference, 6 June 2006.

## THE 2009 LEXICON

**Engagement, engage with:** appearance of doing something about the problem. “It’s about where you link in with local disabled people and making sure you engage with them on a meaningful basis.” Disability minister Anne McGuire, BBC News Online, 4 December 2006.

**Equality:** sameness. Absence of diversity.

**Ethical** (of foreign policy etc): unethical.

**Europe, European Union:** the former is a loose geographical term, the latter a centralising bureaucracy with the openly stated remit of ever closer union.

**Excellence for all:** an oxymoron.

**Exclusion:** temporary suspension.

## F

**Family:** comes in all shapes and sizes. Equivalent to household.

**Family** (blended): step-family.

**Far-reaching reforms:** modest changes. “The far-reaching reforms that I am announcing today will strengthen the role of key stage 2

## THE 2009 LEXICON

national tests for 11-year-olds; radically reform the current key stage 3 testing regime in secondary schools; and introduce a new, simpler and more comprehensive way of reporting to parents on primary and secondary school performance.” Ed Balls, House of Commons, 14 October 2008.

**Fast track:** not allowing Parliament sufficient time to consider the implications of new legislation.

**Flagship:** state schools that are meeting the minimum Ofsted requirements (qv beacon).

**Framework** (often strategic, or national or both): incoherent set of ideas, a miscellany. “On 28 February 2006 the Government launched a nationwide consultation on the UK’s draft National Strategic Reference Framework. The National Strategic Reference Framework is a requirement of the new EU Regulations for the Structural and Cohesion Funds for 2007- 2013 and will establish the broad priorities for future Structural Funds Programmes in the UK.” Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform press release, 23 October 2006.

**Frontline clinicians/teams:** doctors and nurses. “Front-line teams will be supported by a new set

## THE 2009 LEXICON

of graphically illustrated quality measures that will inform the daily decisions that lead to improvement, known as a clinical dashboard.” Alan Johnson, House of Commons, 30 June 2008.

### G

**Golden age** (hark back to a): excuse for why a policy has failed. “Some people will always hark back to a fictitious golden age usually to promote and enhance their own achievements. When this denigrates the hard work and efforts of the nation’s children, it is pernicious and demotivating.” Alan Johnson MP, launching a pre-emptive strike on critics of exam standards, Speech to the UK Youth Parliament, 24 July 2006.

**Good local school/hospital:** reason why ordinary people (qv) should not have any choice.

**Guidance:** government interference.

## H

**Hard-working** (families etc): undefined term of approval. Not to be confused with work-life balance (qv).

**Honours system**: a dishonourable system for repaying favours.

**Holistic** (nearly always of an approach): more bureaucratic.

## I

**Inclusive** (as in big tent): exclusive.

**Incompetence, an**: a reason used by politicians for not obeying the rules. Unlikely to work in negotiations with the Inland Revenue. "It was a mistake that was made. It was an incompetence that he has readily admitted to." Gordon Brown on Peter Hain's late declaration of £103,000 of donations, ITV news interview, 15 January 2008.

**Initiative**: bright idea. (Not to be confused with **New initiative**: reannouncement of bright idea).

**Investment**: current expenditure, and/or waste.

**Issues**: a set of problems that are not going away.

## J

**Joined-up government:** excuse for cross-departmental initiatives which will centralise and increase government intrusion into everyday life.

**Journey:** excuse for failing to achieve target (qv “direction of travel”). “Sure Start was never an event, it is a journey to transform local services for the under-fives and their families.” Beverley Hughes, Children’s Minister, commenting on an evaluation of Sure Start which showed that it is failing to meet its objectives, 5 March 2008.

**Judgemental (to be):** to be critical. “Known for her non-judgemental approach, Bernie is particularly beloved of her clients because she empowers [qv] them to find their own solutions with support.” *Tackling Drugs, Changing Lives Award Winners 2007*, Home Office, 2007.

## K

**Key Performance Indicators:** arbitrary percentage measures based on benchmarks (qv), open to the most optimistic of interpretation. “Of the 39 PIs in the third or bottom quartile, 57% are performing better or the same as they did this time last year”. Papers submitted to the Executive Board, Nottingham City Council, May 2007.

**Key worker:** public sector worker.

## L

**Learning pathways:** education. “Learning Pathways 14-19 is a commitment to the transformation of learning provision for all young people in Wales. Learning Pathways addresses the need for a more flexible and balanced approach to the education of 14-19 year olds, providing a wider range of experiences which will suit the diverse needs of Wales’ young people.” Welsh Assembly Government, *Learning Pathways, 14-19 Years*, 2004.

**Legacy** (leave a lasting): the next Government will pick up the bill. “The Olympics will be legacy games.” Tessa Jowell announcing that the budget for the Olympics had almost trebled, House of Commons, 15 March 2007.

**Lessons** (to be learned): it is time to move on (qv).

**Let me finish:** I will continue talking so that you can not ask any more difficult questions.

**Let’s be clear:** let me obfuscate.

## THE 2009 LEXICON

**Let's be absolutely clear:** I have no evidence to support the following contention but will not be contradicted.

**Leverage:** debt

**Level playing field:** the assumption that it is better for everyone to be worse off than it is for some to be rewarded by their own or their parents' endeavours.

**Levy:** stealth tax, eg. the climate change levy is a tax on business use of energy.

**Liberate talents:** force people into work: "We will give people [i.e. benefit claimants] the help they need and empower [qv] them to liberate their own talents." Tony Blair on the launch of a Welfare Green Paper, 26 January 2006.

**Localism:** when people in a constituency agree with you (cf NIMBYism).

**Looked after children** (referring to children in state care): children who are not looked after.

## M

**Managed:** any process which Government has given up trying to stop (immigration, hospital infection etc).

**Mental health:** mental illness.

**Message** (sending out the right): misguided and unenforceable legislation.

**Migrant:** immigrant.

**Modernisation:** downgrading; needless destruction of independent institutions. Absence of specific policy.

**Move on** (time to): forget.

**Multi-agency:** policy areas where no one is responsible.

## N

**Narrative:** spin, an attempt to provide a common theme to a range of proposals where none exists. Unintentional admission that politics is now equivalent to fiction.

## THE 2009 LEXICON

**National interest:** reason for withholding embarrassing information (cf Open Government).

**Negative territory:** term used by stock brokers to break news gently to clients that their portfolios have declined in value. Also used to describe downward movement in stock markets, or fall in political party poll ratings.

**Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy:** the Government's over-arching (see below) plan for regenerating disadvantaged areas.

**NIMBYism:** when people in a constituency do not agree with you (cf localism).

**Not fit for purpose:** description of any failing government department for which an incoming Secretary of State wishes to allocate all responsibility to the previous Secretary of State.

**Nothing to do:** mitigating excuse for murder  
“Many young people tell me they have nowhere to go, nothing to do.” Sir Al Aynsley-Green, Children's Commissioner For England, discussing the motives of the three teenagers jailed for killing Garry Newlove in a drink-fuelled attack, 18 February 2008.

## O

**Off message:** independent, telling the truth.

**Onion model:** impossible to define. “The ‘onion model’ of the Children’s Trust in action as shown in *Every Child Matters* set out the Government’s vision of what was needed to achieve whole system change. Recent tragic events have demonstrated that there is an urgent need for still greater integration at every layer of the ‘onion’ in frontline delivery, processes, strategy and governance. At the level of service delivery in particular there remains significant practical, philosophical and resource barriers to full integration.” Briefing from the Children’s Society on the Queen’s Speech, 1 December 2008.

**Open Government:** letting people see the bits of government of which the Government is not ashamed (cf national interest).

**Over-arching:** a portentous term for ‘overall’. Usually accompanied at local government conferences by expansive hand movements to indicate the width of the subject being arched. “The Cabinet Office has an overarching purpose of making Government work better.” Ed Miliband, House of Commons, 16 July 2007.

## P

**Partner** (domestic): catch-all term for spouse, co-habitee, lover, girlfriend/boyfriend.

**Partnership:** a relationship in which the Government is dominant over the other partner. “Mr Brown kept saying ‘this is a partnership’, a reference to Labour activists and Government”. *Evening Standard*, 5 April 2006.

**People:** the Government. “The People’s Budget”; “The People’s Europe”; “The People’s Government”, “The People’s Honours”, “The People’s Lottery”, “The People’s Millennium”, “The People’s Money”, “The People’s Priorities” etc.

**Person-centred planning:** provider-centred planning, planning to suit convenience of social services rather than that of the individual person. “A person-centred approach will be essential to deliver real change in the lives of people with learning disabilities. Person-centred planning provides a single, multi-agency [qv] mechanism for achieving this. The Government will issue new guidance on person-centred planning, and provide resources [qv] for implementation through the Learning Disability Development Fund.” *Valuing People, A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Department of Health, 2001.

## THE 2009 LEXICON

**Personalisation** (of public services): how the Government decides which services it will let you have. "This is the future for our public services. Accessible to all, personal to you." Gordon Brown, speech to the Labour Party Conference, 24 September 2007.

**Pledge:** a numerical target symbolising (but not realising) a greater reform.

**Postcode lottery:** localism.

**Proactive:** should have been dealt with years ago.

**Progressive** (eg progressive consensus, progressive alliance, progressive Conservatism): undefined term of approval (qv social, sustainable).

**Public inquiry:** an investigation which is set up in such a way as to avoid inquiry as far as possible; to kick into the long grass.

**Public service agreement:** arbitrary, centrally imposed and centrally monitored bureaucratic process encouraging the reproduction of quangos.

## Q

**Quality:** as an adjective, applied to barely-adequate or unsatisfactory state service, eg 'quality childcare'.

**Quick wins:** term widely used in government departments to describe relatively cheap and easy initiatives that have an immediate impact. Not to be confused with 'eye catching new initiative' or short termism. "Homes built in the future will be more carbon neutral, however the vast majority of buildings pre-date our awareness of emissions and climate change – these are where quick wins can be achieved." Professor John Beddington, Chief Scientific Adviser, 26 November 2008.

## R

**Radical** (of reform): minor technical/organisational adjustment.

**Raft** (whole raft of...): unknown quantity.

**Real issue:** the question that a politician wants to answer, as opposed to the question that was actually asked.

## THE 2009 LEXICON

**Redeployment of resources:** cut in government spending.

**Referendum:** opportunity for people to express agreement with the Government.

**Regulation (better):** continued regulation; the opposite of deregulation.

**Respect:** ignore. “The Information Commissioner is developing guidelines against which information sharing proposals involving personal data might be assessed, and a framework Code of Practice which will help public sector organisations ensure that their sharing of personal information respects personal privacy.” *Information-sharing vision statement*, DCA, September 2006.

**Risk (to manage):** to keep records of correspondence with other public sector organisations so that you can evade responsibility if something goes wrong.

**Road map:** a plan, used to give the false appearance that a route is waiting to be discovered. “We now have in place a road map that will lead to better regulated remote gambling across the world.” Richard Caborn, *The Times*, 1 November 2006.

## S

**Scope:** impossible to define. “Once we are satisfied we have interpreted and answered your comments accurately, the Final Scope for this intervention guidance, along with the Stakeholder Comments Response Table relating to this consultation will be posted on the NICE website.” Project Co-ordinator, Centre for Public Health Excellence, 3 January 2008.

**Send a message:** enforce. “This measure {a £25 a day congestion charge for ‘gas guzzlers’} sends a clear message to manufacturers”. Ken Livingstone, 18 February 2008.

**Silo** (as in silo mentality): organisation arranged by sealed, vertical shafts. Hence admonitions at public sector conferences not to be entrapped in ‘silos’. Often sounded by those at the top of silos to colleagues in the lower echelons of silos. “It is often the silo mentality of local as well as central government that acts as a major barrier to disabled people getting the holistic [qv] help that they need to lift themselves out of poverty or other difficulties.” Anne Begg, House of Commons, 4 May 2006.

**Social** (eg social investment; social entrepreneur; social capital, social responsibility): “If you put the word ‘social’ in front of any serious word, you

## THE 2009 LEXICON

reduce it almost to meaninglessness.” F A Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, 1973.

**Social capital:** Term used to describe relationship of trust between peoples within one particular group or between people from different social groups in a particular area. Frequently used when there is a notable absence of any other type of capital.

**Social Cohesion:** Purpose of government initiatives to encourage citizens to appreciate and celebrate diversity within local communities. “I think it is true that there are a lot of different parts of the government involved in promoting social cohesion, but I think that is probably a good thing because what that demonstrates is that we are picking up the issues around social cohesion and community cohesion in a lot of different places because it is relevant to a lot of different things.” Yvette Cooper, evidence to the Select Committee on Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, February 2004.

**Social capital:** Term used to describe relationship of trust between peoples within one particular group or between people from different social groups in a particular area. Frequently used when there is a notable absence of any other type of capital.

## THE 2009 LEXICON

**Social regeneration:** Non economic dimension of regeneration; frequently used where is no evidence of economic regeneration.

**Solid Platform:** failure. "It's been a hard road but Labour has built a solid platform. Moving up to the next level... will require completely new thinking" Andy Burnham, on Government attempt to improve value for money in public services, 16 January 2008.

**Stakeholder:** anyone involved with an organisation whose interests the Government believes should counterbalance and if possible outweigh those who (a) actually own the business or (b) work for it.

**Step-change:** more of the same. "Government signals a step-change on environmentally sustainable behaviour". DEFRA press release, 12 June 2006.

**Sterile debate:** I don't want to talk about this any more (qv move on). "We need to move on from a sterile debate about governance to a realisation that these reforms are essential to giving some of the most disadvantaged children in the country more opportunities than they have enjoyed up until now." Pat McFadden, minister of state for employment relations, 19 February 2008: "We have got stuck in a sterile

## THE 2009 LEXICON

debate on the number of days. We need to move the debate to ask: is it parliament or the judiciary that should call the home secretary to account?" Martin Salter 26 February 2008. "Over the last ten years, Britain has been lost in a sterile debate between public and private. It's time to move on." Work and pensions secretary James Purnell in a speech launching a new 'Commissioning Strategy' 28 February 2008. "We have been trapped in this sterile debate about road pricing." Ruth Kelly, 4 March 2008. Originated by David Cameron who condemned the "sterile debate" over the Conservatives' grammar schools policy in 2006.

**Stigmatise:** what must never be done (qv judgemental).

**Strategic** (of vision etc.): something which you have, but which your rivals do not.

**Streamlined services:** services which are more complicated for the patient/parent.

**Sub-prime:** dodgy.

**Sure Start:** nationalisation of child-rearing.

**Sustainable:** all purpose adjective of approval (qv progressive, social). See Preface.

## T

**Third sector:** managerialism for charity.

**Time of change** (almost always unparalleled or unprecedented): all times are times of change.

**Tipping point:** unquantified threat of future calamity used to justify vast current investment (qv). “Your conference is titled ‘Environmental policy at tipping point’. That may turn out to be more true than you imagine.” David Miliband, Speech to the Environmental Industries Commission, 8 November 2006.

**Traffic calming:** traffic enraging.

**Trail:** selectively leak to a compliant journalist.

**Trail-blazer:** untested scheme usually involving more government bureaucracy.

**Transformation:** no change.

**Treatment** (as of drugs): state provision of free drugs.

**Truth:** that which cannot be disproved with the available evidence.

## U

**Under consideration** (the matter is under consideration): we have lost the file.

**Under urgent consideration** (the matter is under urgent consideration): we are trying to find the file (originally from Yes Minister). Now applies to computer discs.

**Universal:** compulsory.

## V

**Values:** what we have and the others lack.

**Vision:** useful to have when short of policies.  
“What I want to do is show people the vision that we have for the future of this country in housing and health and education and I want the chance, in the next phase of my premiership, to develop and show people the policies that are going to make a huge difference and show the change in the country itself.” Gordon Brown, explaining why he was not going to call an election, Press Association, 6 October 2007.

## W

**War** (on abstract nouns such as obesity, terror etc.): crackdown (qv).

**Wide-ranging** (as in wide-ranging review): term used to suggest that the government is solving the problem. “The loss of this data together with losses in previous incidents means that a wide-ranging review is necessary so that lessons could be learnt.” Prime Minister’s announcement on progress of Poynter Review, 17 December 2007.

**Worklessness:** unemployment.

**Work-life balance:** more time-off (qv hard working).

## Y

**Year of Intercultural Dialogue:** EU’s description of 2008 “With an overall budget of €10 million, the European Year will draw on the wealth and diversity of a series of specific projects to be implemented during 2008 through programmes and other Community actions. Culture, education, youth, sport and citizenship will be the main areas concerned.” EU Press Release, 2005.

**Year of Creativity and Innovation:** EU

description of 2009. “Ján Figel’ Commissioner responsible for education, training, culture and youth, believes the Year is ‘an effective way of helping to meet challenges by raising public awareness, disseminating information about good practices, stimulating education and research, creativity and innovation, and promoting policy debate and change. By combining action at Community, national, regional and local levels, it can generate synergies and help to focus policy debate on specific issues.’ “ EU Press Release, 31 March 2008.

**Z**

**Zero tolerance** (announcement of): how Ministers promise to respond to a problem (qv crackdown, announcement of). “Johnson to pledge ‘zero tolerance’ on MRSA”, *Daily Telegraph*, 26 September 2007; “Smith announces zero tolerance crime crackdown”, *The Guardian*, 27 September 2007.