



Councillor Margaret Eaton,  
LGA Chairman,  
Local Government House  
Smith Square  
London - SW1P 3HZ  
Great Britain

Strasbourg, 15th May 2009

Dear Ms Eaton,

We are writing to you concerning the LGA's recent decision to issue a list to councils of "200 words and phrases that all public sector bodies should avoid" (LGA media release, 18 March 2009).

Firstly, we would like to commend the LGA for such an excellent initiative. We at the Assembly of European Regions (AER) are keenly aware of the need for local and regional politicians to communicate more effectively with citizens. And as a pan-European organisation working with 270 regional authorities in 33 countries, we especially encourage the use of "plain English" in communicating with non-native speakers.

Nevertheless, we are writing to request that the LGA "de-ban" one particular term – the word "subsidiarity" – from the list. We find it rather ironic that the LGA has "ditched" a word so dear to local and regional authorities – and their associations – across the world.

AER lobbied hard for the inclusion of the subsidiarity principle in the EU's Maastricht Treaty, and we can proudly say that the proposed Lisbon Treaty extends the principle to include regional and local authorities. We are sure you will agree that this is a huge step in establishing a real system of multi-level governance within the EU, heralding the kind of partnership status that regions and local authorities have long sought.

We note that your list includes alternatives that could replace the jargon terms, but that for "subsidiarity" there is simply the question "why use at all?" This suggests to us that the LGA recognises that there is no alternative to the word. It also suggests that the word is not considered "jargon" in the sense that terms such as "predictors of beaconicity" are. But if there is no alternative, how else can we describe the principle that "decisions should be taken as closely as possible to the citizen"?

Given that fact, is there not another way we can promote a principle that is so important and yet based upon a word that is so clumsy?

We believe there is. And that is why AER launched, in May 2008, the "Subsidiarity is a word" movement. Our aim is to secure recognition of the word in dictionaries and spell-

checkers (including Microsoft Word) around the world. Such formal recognition, we feel, is the first step to people learning about the word and understanding the importance of the principle. And that, ultimately, is the best way to put pressure on national governments and the EU to actually respect that principle.

If you go to [www.aer.eu](http://www.aer.eu) and click on the "Subsidiarity is a word" postcard you will see that our movement is bringing the word to people all across Europe. Dozens of dictionaries have now recognised the word, hundreds of people are supporting our Facebook group, and thousands more have watched our "Subsidiarity Man" stunts on YouTube. We are receiving messages of support and lists of "shamed" dictionaries from as far away as China and the United States – in other words, our movement is having a real and direct impact on people.

We therefore ask that the LGA consider removing the word from its "hit-list", in which case the LGA and AER could issue a joint press release announcing the decision. This would of course generate further publicity for AER's movement; but it would also be another opportunity for the LGA to promote its fight against the use of jargon, not only in the UK but also across the rest of Europe.

We look forward to your response and would be glad to discuss this issue with you further. Please do not hesitate to contact us via AER's secretariat should you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,



Michèle Sabban, AER President



Brian Greenslade, AER Vice-President and Leader of Devon County Council (Liberal Democrat)



David Kirk, AER Bureau member and Executive Lead Member for Children's Services, Hampshire County Council (Conservative)



Paul Kirkman, AER Bureau member and Councillor of Essex County Council (Labour)