



National Policy  National Procedure  National Protocol  National Guideline   
National Clinical Guideline

## HSE NATIONAL GUIDELINE FOR HEALTH SERVICE NEWS CONTENT

### DOCUMENT GOVERNANCE <sup>[1]</sup>

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*Additional headings can be inserted if required*

### DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT <sup>[2]</sup>

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Note: Original document is Version 0. First revision is Version 1. Second revision is Version 2, and so on.

Note: HSE National 3PGs should be formally reviewed every 3 years, unless new legislative/regulatory or emerging issues/research/technology/audit etc. dictates sooner.

<sup>[1]</sup> Records the senior management roles involved in the governance and development of the document.

<sup>[2]</sup> Records the control information about the document.

### VERSION CONTROL UPDATE <sup>[1]</sup>

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first)	(most recent date first)	
1	22/08/2025	Updates to content
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<b>Additional notes:</b>		

<b>PUBLICATION INFORMATION <sup>[2]</sup></b>	
<b>Topic:</b>	
	Health Service News
<b>National Group:</b>	
	Internal Communications
<b>Short summary:</b>	
	This guideline provides guidance on creating content for inclusion in Health Service News.
<b>Description:</b>	
	This document from National Internal Communications covers the principles and rules for communicating to staff via the Health Service Staff News email. There is guidance on accessibility, layout, meeting Plain English requirements, avoiding jargon, word count limits and tone of voice.

<sup>[1]</sup> Records details when a document is reviewed, even if no changes are made.

<sup>[2]</sup> Records the document information required for publication on the HSE National Central Repository.



## **Health Service News content rules**

### **Ethics**

How we communicate with staff is reflective of how we want people to communicate across the organisation.

The HSE Internal Communications (IC) team always aim to communicate with staff in accordance with the Institute of Internal Communication (IOIC) profession's ethical guide. This means that all communications we create are accessible, inclusive and transparent to our audience.

The focus for Health Service News updates is clear, timely, consistent and professional messaging that is relevant to all staff.

The Internal Communications team are happy to work with you to help to create an effective message for staff. Please read our content rules before submitting content.

### **Content rules overview**

1. All content must meet Plain English requirements.
2. Jargon must be limited or removed
3. Marketing language cannot be used
4. The layout must comply with accessibility guidelines for users with screen readers
5. The word count is 100 words maximum for content and 70 characters for headlines
6. We speak directly to staff using 'you'
7. We say 'we' rather than the HSE
8. We use active language rather than the passive voice.

### **Accessibility legislation**



We are required to make our staff website and any mobile applications accessible under the [European accessibility act](#). The Internal Communications team develops content in line with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.1 AA standard.

This means that:

- all our content must meet Plain English requirements
- the layout must comply with accessibility guidelines for users with screen readers

[Read the healthservice.ie Accessibility Statement](#)

### **Plain English**

We write using Plain English so that everyone can understand us. We simplify complex terms and remove jargon to make the messages clear for all readers. If staff cannot understand the message, they cannot take action.

- The HSE Digital team has developed [useful guidelines around plain English](#). Please refer to them when drafting your content. If you need to request access to these guidelines, contact the HSE Digital team: [digital@hse.ie](mailto:digital@hse.ie)
- [Hemmingway App](#) is a useful online tool for checking if your content could be simplified.
- [Use the plain English A to Z](#) for alternatives to complex terms

The Internal Communications team will help you simplify your message into plain English.

### **Layout**

- Link text needs to be descriptive, in line with accessibility legislation
  - Link text that is descriptive: Read the COVID-19 report
  - Link text that is not descriptive: Read more or read here
- Accompanying images cannot contain text. Alt text will be added to all images by the Internal Communications team to tell screen readers what the image contains.
- Bullet lists should be used to lay out information clearly, where applicable.
- Text should not be in bold.
- Consider the flow of your message. Put the main information at the start. Readers need know the Who, What, When, Where and Why.

### **Word count**



The word count is 100 words maximum. Headlines should be short – aim for 70 characters maximum (including spaces). Headlines should give a clear description of what the update is about.

Staff are busy. All content must be short and to the point so it can be read and understood quickly. Link to core content on [healthservice.ie](http://healthservice.ie), where possible, where staff can read more detailed content online.

Keep sentences to 15 to 20 words on average. Avoid wordy phrases.

### **Tone**

We do not use slogans or marketing language in staff communications. Messages need to be informative and factual.

- Marketing language: We are delighted to announce that the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Learning Hub is now available. This is an exciting new development for the HSE.
- Factual language: The Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Learning Hub is now available on HSeLanD.

We tailor messages to staff with a focus on their specific needs.

Use 'I', 'we' and 'you'. Avoid saying 'the HSE'.

Use the active voice instead of the passive voice in your writing.

- Active: The nurse can vaccinate your child
- Passive: Your child can be vaccinated