



Office of the
Commissioner of
Official Languages

Commissariat
aux langues
officielles

AUDIT

OF THE DELIVERY OF BILINGUAL SERVICES
TO THE PUBLIC BY SERVICE CANADA

FOLLOW-UP
April 2014



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Cat. No.: SF31-105/2014E-PDF
ISBN: 978-1-100-23398-7

In December 2010, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages published an audit of the delivery of bilingual services to the public by Service Canada. The audit was conducted between April 2009 and April 2010 and included seven recommendations (see Appendix A) to help the institution improve delivery of bilingual services to the public, as per Part IV of the *Official Languages Act* (the Act).

The seven recommendations focused on the following objectives:

- Ensure that Service Canada management is committed to implementing Part IV of the Act in order to provide appropriate bilingual services to Canadians.
- Ensure that front-line personnel in Service Canada's bilingual service points provide active offer and deliver services of equal quality in English and French to the public.
- Ensure that Service Canada consults representatives of official language minority communities in the various regions and takes the results into consideration when planning for the provision of bilingual services.
- Ensure that Service Canada is effectively monitoring the quality of service delivery in both official languages.

In September 2013, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages completed a follow-up of the audit to examine and report on the measures taken by the institution to implement the Commissioner's recommendations.

Our analysis of Service Canada's progress report and supporting documents, as well as additional information obtained through interviews, revealed the following:

MANAGEMENT'S COMMITMENT

In Recommendations 1, 2 and 3, the Commissioner called on Service Canada to develop an accountability framework, improve its action plan and develop an official languages policy. These three recommendations were satisfactorily implemented.

- Service Canada developed and implemented an official languages accountability framework that clearly defines its official languages obligations. This framework is part of Service Canada's 2011–2014 action plan and performance measurement strategy for official languages. We are satisfied with Service Canada's accountability framework.

- Service Canada's three-year action plan, which is reviewed annually, includes measures, performance indicators, timelines and an accountability mechanism. Service Canada reinforces its commitment to official languages by including a reporting mechanism in its plan to inform the official languages champion, the three assistant deputy ministers responsible for official languages and the Corporate Management Committee on the status of the official languages program. In addition, the four regional offices have developed operational plans aligned with Service Canada's official languages action plan.

We are satisfied with the official languages action plan. We believe that putting the plan into effect and then monitoring it will help Service Canada to improve the active offer and delivery of services in English and French.

Since the 2010 audit, Service Canada has developed a policy on services to the public in both official languages. This policy has been approved by the executive committee and posted on the intranet. We have reviewed this policy and are satisfied with its content.

- Arising from this policy is the Directive on Official Languages Obligations in Bilingual Service Canada Offices. This directive comes from the working group responsible for evaluating the language profiles of officer and team leader positions, as well as the bilingual capacity needed to serve the public in both official languages at Service Canada's bilingual service centres.

We have examined a draft of the directive, which provides information on Part IV of the Act. The directive includes the Methodology for Determining Bilingual Capacity, which will be a useful tool for managers. We recognize Service Canada's initiative to include this valuable reference. This key directive was approved by senior management in 2013.

- Also arising from the policy is the directive on official languages obligations in unilingual Service Canada offices, which was implemented in 2011. This directive has the same objectives as those for bilingual Service Canada offices, but it is tailored for unilingual points of service. We are satisfied with this initiative.

- In addition, Service Canada indicated that existing directives relating to Parts V and VI and section 91 of the Act are being reviewed.

Recommendations 1, 2 and 3 also required that Service Canada communicate its key official languages documents (accountability framework, plans and policies) to all staff.

- The institution developed and implemented a communications strategy to inform employees of their official languages obligations. Employees have been made aware of the new official languages intranet site, which was launched in 2012 and which includes a wide range of information and tools related to official languages.

In Recommendation 4, the Commissioner called on Service Canada to address issues regarding performance evaluation and training of senior executives and managers. This recommendation was satisfactorily implemented.

- The audit had revealed the need to define official languages obligations in performance evaluations at different levels of personnel. In 2011, the associate deputy minister sent a directive to deputy ministers and regional executives. This directive described the official languages corporate commitments and objectives that were included in performance management agreements and in performance and learning agreements for managers and staff who deliver services to the public in English and French in designated bilingual service centres.

The section on “corporate commitment” of the performance agreement for the executive group now includes an objective to fulfill official languages obligations related to Parts IV, V and VII of the Act. This section also includes a reference to the Office of the Commissioner’s audit report on the delivery of bilingual services to the public.

- In terms of training, the Service Canada College launched two on-line courses in 2012 called *Exercising my Leadership in Official Languages* and *Official Languages and Me*. As of 2012–2013, the courses, which cover Part IV, Part VII and section 91 of the Act, are part of Service Canada’s mandatory training program for managers, supervisors, team leaders and citizen service officers.

BILINGUAL SERVICES TO THE PUBLIC

In Recommendation 5, the Commissioner called on Service Canada to review the number of designated bilingual citizen service officer and team leader positions in designated bilingual service points across Canada, and to define the language profile required to perform the tasks in the job descriptions of certain employees who must serve the public. This recommendation was satisfactorily implemented.

- The audit showed that there were not enough bilingual positions to meet the requirements of Part IV of the Act in some of the designated bilingual service centres. It also revealed inconsistencies in the language profiles of citizen service officers and team leaders. Since the audit, Service Canada has established a formal working group composed of senior managers, managers and official languages coordinators from the national headquarters and the four regional offices. The mandate of this working group was to develop two standards that would, on one hand, target the bilingual capacity of all of Service Canada’s bilingual service centres and, on the other, examine the language profiles of various positions. The working group has completed its work and, in parallel, a Directive on Official Languages Obligations in Bilingual Service Canada Offices will be completed in fiscal year 2013–2014.

We acknowledge Service Canada’s efforts and we strongly believe that the revised profiles will be useful for the institution. However, we emphasize that the intention of the recommendation was to ensure the necessary measures are taken to remedy the lack of bilingual capacity and to ensure the delivery of services of equal quality in both languages. Consequently, to truly have an impact on Canadians, the institution needs to apply the revised language profiles as soon as possible to the concerned staff.

CONSULTATION WITH OFFICIAL LANGUAGE MINORITY COMMUNITIES

In Recommendation 6, the Commissioner called on Service Canada to establish a structured and coordinated mechanism for regular consultation with national, provincial and regional representatives of official language minority communities. This recommendation was partially implemented.

- Service Canada's three-year action plan for official languages includes measures for consulting official language minority communities. However, provincial and regional representatives have not been consulted in a structured or organized manner.
- Since the 2010 audit, Service Canada has established a consultation framework and has formally consulted with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, a national group, and the Quebec Community Groups Network, a provincial group.
- However, there is still more work to be done. Service Canada will need to review and revise its consultation framework to include specific information on provincial and regional representatives. These representatives should be regularly involved in structured and coordinated consultations. Service Canada also needs to establish a formal mechanism to consult a wider network of official language minority community organizations.

In 2011 and 2012, Service Canada carried out a mystery shopper exercise in which 1,000 visits were made in 75% of Service Canada's bilingual service centres. The exercise revealed that 89% of the mystery shoppers received services in the official language of their choice. It is important to note that Service Canada's results did not indicate whether the methodology used for this exercise allowed for statistically valid results.

With regard to wait times, Service Canada is currently conducting a pilot project to evaluate a wait time indicator based on language of service. We recognize this positive initiative and encourage Service Canada to implement it as soon as possible.

MONITORING MECHANISMS

In Recommendation 7, the Commissioner called on Service Canada to institute a formal monitoring mechanism to periodically measure and report on the quality of services provided in both official languages, including wait times. This recommendation was satisfactorily implemented.

- Since the audit, a formal performance measurement strategy has been developed and put in place. Part of the institution's accountability framework and three-year action plan on Part IV of the Act, the strategy includes mechanisms such as client satisfaction surveys and mystery shopper exercises to monitor the implementation of official languages obligations and report on performance. We believe that these are appropriate monitoring mechanisms because they help control the quality of Service Canada's bilingual services in order to improve and secure tangible results.
- Since the 2010 audit, Service Canada has evaluated its performance with regard to the active offer and delivery of services in both official languages. Results of a 2010 telephone survey of 4,000 Canadians revealed that 93% of members of official language minority communities received services in the language of their choice.

CONCLUSION

Service Canada has demonstrated its commitment to official languages by developing and implementing new frameworks and directives and by revising other key official languages documents. Since the 2010 audit, Service Canada has also implemented a satisfactory official languages action plan. In addition, it has integrated official languages objectives in performance management agreements, developed new official languages training modules, developed tools for managers and employees and launched a new official languages intranet site where all staff have access to a wide variety of information.

The Commissioner of Official Languages is satisfied with Service Canada's actions to implement six of his seven recommendations in order to improve the delivery of bilingual services.

The Commissioner is only partially satisfied with the efforts to implement Recommendation 6. To comply with the Act, Service Canada must also immediately establish a structured and coordinated mechanism for regular consultation with provincial and regional representatives of official language minority communities. In addition, Service Canada needs to review its official languages consultation framework.

Regarding Recommendation 5, although considered satisfactorily implemented, Service Canada will still need to implement the revised language profiles of designated bilingual citizen service officer and team leader positions in designated bilingual service points across Canada. We cannot stress enough the importance of timeliness in this matter. Service Canada plays a key role in providing services to Canadians. It must ensure that it has the capacity to provide services of equal quality in both official languages. Consequently, we will maintain regular communications with the institution to monitor progress.

APPENDIX A

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SERVICE CANADA

RECOMMENDATION 1

SATISFACTORILY IMPLEMENTED

The Commissioner recommends that Service Canada develop and implement an accountability framework for official languages in order to clearly define all of its obligations. He also recommends that this framework be communicated to all staff.

RECOMMENDATION 2

SATISFACTORILY IMPLEMENTED

The Commissioner recommends that Service Canada include additional objectives in its national action plan in order to guarantee the effective and complete implementation of Part IV of the *Official Languages Act* and ensure the delivery of services of equal quality in English and French in all designated bilingual service centres and call centres. The plan should also include timelines, performance indicators and an accountability mechanism. The regional offices should, in turn, develop and implement operational plans for official languages that follow the national action plan while taking their regional concerns into account. These plans should be communicated to all personnel.

RECOMMENDATION 3

SATISFACTORILY IMPLEMENTED

The Commissioner recommends that Service Canada develop an official languages policy that includes all the components of Part IV of the *Official Languages Act*. This policy should be effectively communicated to all staff. In addition, Service Canada should remind all employees of existing official language policies.

RECOMMENDATION 4

SATISFACTORILY IMPLEMENTED

The Commissioner recommends that Service Canada:

- a) integrate objectives on all its bilingual service delivery obligations into its procedure for evaluating the performance of senior executives, managers, team leaders and front-line personnel responsible for serving the public in English and French at designated bilingual service points, and
- b) give mandatory training to senior executives and managers with staffing authority on all aspects of the linguistic designation of positions and language profiles required to meet job descriptions.

RECOMMENDATION 5

SATISFACTORILY IMPLEMENTED

The Commissioner recommends that Service Canada review the number of designated bilingual citizen service officer and team leader positions in designated bilingual service points across Canada. He also recommends that Service Canada define the language profile required to perform the tasks in the job descriptions of employees who must serve the public in person, by telephone and via the Internet or the computer system.

RECOMMENDATION 6

PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED

The Commissioner recommends that Service Canada establish a structured and coordinated mechanism for regular consultation with national, provincial and regional representatives of official language minority communities in order to identify their specific needs with respect to the programs and services provided by the institution. An ongoing feedback process should be added to this consultation mechanism.

RECOMMENDATION 7

SATISFACTORILY IMPLEMENTED

The Commissioner recommends that Service Canada institute a formal monitoring mechanism that can be applied accurately in all regions to periodically measure and report on the quality of services provided in both official languages, including wait times.